

Division & Unity
Romans 16:17-20 / Colossians 3:12-17
Colebrook Congregational Church
August 14, 2016 (Off Lectionary)

I did not like the lectionary suggestions for this week. Not even a little bit. So I had to figure out something to preach from, but that sort of freedom can be daunting.

In the two sets of verses from Paul's Letters that I selected, both are worried about false teachers going among those churches, causing chaos and disunity. In his Letter to the Romans, Paul gives warning about those who cause division among the congregation with their false teachings that go against the Good News of God's Love. In his letter to the Colossians, Paul does the same, but from the other direction, giving us the positive examples: compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, forgiveness, and above all else, LOVE.

Last Tuesday, my day off, there was a primary for the Republican Party's nominee for the 63rd District of this state's General Assembly. When I left the Parsonage to check my mail, I found that one of the campaigns had posted a sign on the Parsonage lawn. I was incensed by this and promptly removed it. This did get me thinking about how this is an election year, and how election years divide us.

Every two years, this country divides itself to elect representatives and leaders; and while this process may get heated, filled with lies, mud-slinging, and animosity, especially this year, relatively speaking, it is a peaceful & orderly process, without the violence seen in other countries when power changes hands.

Most election years, I get very annoyed, and I find myself marathoning "The West Wing" on Netflix. There is a two-part episode called, "20 Hours in America," where three of the main characters are left behind by the motorcade in an Indiana farm field after a campaign speech, and it takes them twenty hours to make it back to the White House.

For nearly the entire two-parter, two of those characters were bickering about the campaign, strategy, and voter issues. While this was happening, they were oblivious to the actual problems & situations of those around them, until the third main character had enough of the other two and scolds them for their divisiveness and obliviousness.

Having been properly chastised, they started working together on a practical bill to make college tuition tax deductible. They accomplished nothing of substance while bickering and being divisive, nothing until they started working together.

While at Divinity School, I served a church in North Guilford as a student intern. They institutionalized their community's diversity. When they convene their Intern Committee, they make sure their whole spectrum is represented, because they felt by doing so, the student intern is given the widest possible scope of experiences and feedback. They even made a decision that their communal unity was of the utmost importance to them. If an issue came up, they would look at all sides of it, then determine if taking a position would be divisive to their community, and if so, they would not take a position either way, and preserve their unity.

Debate is good, but not so much that it blinds us to what matters. Disagreements are okay, until they reach a point where it erodes all the good that is possible. What Paul is warning us against is letting divisiveness tear our relationships apart, and we can apply that to any situation. Elections & families, churches & friendships. In all things, we are to remember, as followers of Christ, we are to avoid divisiveness, and we are to do, above all things, Love God and our neighbors.

Please join me in the spirit of prayer:

O God, we thank You for the Apostle Paul and his advice to us. Help us to remember to always clothe ourselves in love, to let the peace of Christ rule in our hearts, to let the Word of Christ dwell in us, to let wisdom rule our actions, to sing songs of praise to God with gratitude in our hearts, and that in whatever we do, in word or deed, we do all we can in the name of Jesus.

Amen.

Intercessory Prayer

[PAUSE]

God of salvation, who sent Your Son to seek out and save what is lost, hear our prayers on behalf of those who are lost in our day, receiving these petitions and thanksgivings with your unending compassion.

We give You thanks for all the blessings and lessons You have shared with us. May we always approach You and our neighbors with a grateful heart full of Your Love.

We confess that our sin and pride hide the brightness of Your light, when we turn away from the poor; when we ignore cries for justice; and when we do not strive for peace. Forgive us, God. In your mercy, cleanse us, so that, as forgiven and renewed people, we may reflect the love and life of Jesus Christ into our world.

Be with those who are distraught, those who are without, those who know not peace, those who struggle with addiction, those who are in need, and those who are unwell in mind, body, or spirit. Be with the victims of violence and their loved ones. Help us to comfort them with Your abundant Love. Bless the services of all Your people, and assure them that You are pleased with their work.

We pray that You help lead us through our own trials, the sufferings and sorrows, the challenges and struggles, and back to Your Love. Fill us with hope, sustained in Your mercy, giving us guidance through Your Word, and stamina through Your Spirit.

We especially pray for:

God of justice, Your word is light and truth. Let Your face shine on us to restore us, that we may walk in Your way, seeking justice and doing good. Amen.

Romans 16:17-20

17 I urge you, brothers and sisters, to keep an eye on those who cause dissensions and offences, in opposition to the teaching that you have learned; avoid them. 18 For such people do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the simple-minded. 19 For while your obedience is known to all, so that I rejoice over you, I want you to be wise in what is good, and guileless in what is evil. 20 The God of peace will shortly crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

Colossians 3:12-17

12 As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. 13 Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord* has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. 14 Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. 15 And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. 16 Let the word of Christ* dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God.* 17 And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Psalm 1

1 Happy are those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or take the path that sinners tread, or sit in the seat of scoffers;
2 but their delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law they meditate day and night.
3 They are like trees planted by streams of water, which yield their fruit in its season, and their leaves do not wither. In all that they do, they prosper.
4 The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away.
5 Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgement, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;
6 for the Lord watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.