

11-8-2020 SERMON CCI Romans 12: 9-21 Life After the Election

What a wild chaotic election week last week was! Here it is Sunday after Election Day and we still do not have the final vote tally, but we do have enough votes to have a President and Vice President Elect. Lawsuits have been filed about the ballots and voting processes, at least one state has to vote again, and some people are protesting while others are line dancing in the streets. Some people have a new hope, and others feel despair and anger. Are you like me- feeling a bit on edge, a little fearful of what the future holds, my attention span is short. Although I am pleased with the election results, I am also disappointed to realize that as a nation, we are even more divided than I thought, and we still have a long way to go to make America truly a place where all people are equal. I thought we had made more progress than this. So how are we called to live after an election like this one?

If you thought to yourself as Rob read today's scripture reading, "Haven't we heard this text recently?" You were right; I preached on this scripture in August, not that long ago, but I think it deserves a relook in a time like this. The Apostle Paul wrote these words to Christians in the church in Rome calling them to live up to their calling in Christ, to live out their faith. And he described some of what that would look like. On this day after Joe Biden has been declared the President-Elect, it has a message for us too. Paul reminds us that now is not the time to relax and say a loud, "Whew, I'm glad that's over. Now we can go back to the status quo." No, it is time to put on our work gloves and work boots and get busy doing our part in healing the nation.

In this post-election time of opposing celebration and anger, disappointment, deep red and blue divisions between family and friends, states and cities, and probable nationwide protesting and even violence, even in a time like this, Paul says that our love must be sincere. This is not a time to say and sing on Sunday mornings that we love everybody, and then live and think through the week in ways that show the opposite of love. The two commandments that Jesus said are

the greatest commandments have not changed: “Love your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength and love your neighbor as yourself.” They are still the greatest of the commandments. The sincerity of our love is going to be tested in the time we are in. Do I only love those who are like me and haven’t offended me lately? Or do I choose to love just as sincerely those who think differently from me, and who may even look down on me for my beliefs? Is my love sincere enough to love them too? Do I reserve my love for my own kind? Can we love people of a different political party? I heard a pastor say recently, “Don’t be a dyed-in-the-wool anything other than a follower of Jesus Christ.” Paul says a dyed-in-the-wool follower of Jesus loves sincerely like Jesus loves. And Jesus said, “They will know you are my disciples by the way you love one another.”

Sincere love is not wishy-washy. It’s not a warm fuzzy feeling. I don’t know if there are many warm fuzzies left in this nation right now. Sincere love cares sincerely about the needs and concerns of others and works for their good. Sincere love is hard and costly. For example, Paul says that sincere love will cause us to bless those who persecute us. Many of us have experienced persecuting words, words designed to humiliate us during this election season. Maybe you are like me and have been told all Democrats are going to hell. Can we sincerely pray **for** people who say such things, not **against** them? Asking God to bless them? I listened to Rev. Paula White pray for our current President last week, heard her pray that God would destroy the demons who oppose his leadership, to strike them down and destroy them. Friends, she was praying against me, a fellow follower of Christ. Paul says to bless those who persecute us, to bless and not curse. Only sincere love enables us to do that.

Sincere love also recognizes that there are things to hate. Hate what is evil, hate what is against who and what matters to God. Hate whatever harms others, whatever sets up one group as superior to another, whatever deprives others of common decency. It’s so easy to be angry when we see such hate-worthy things in others, we see other peoples’ sins so clearly, don’t we? **Sincere** love also calls us to look

inside our own hearts too, and hate those same things in ourselves. It's why Jesus said to take the plank out of our own eye- take a look inside first- before trying to take the splinter out of someone else's eye. Sincere love humbles us, so that we can honestly work for what is good and just for all.

A phrase that stands out to me during this post-election time is in verse 15: "*Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.*" We enjoy rejoicing with each other in this church. It comes natural. And if you voted for Joe Biden and Kamala Harris, there's cause for rejoicing, and yes, even dancing in the streets. Rob and I celebrated with a bowl of ice cream last evening. But let there be no gloating- that smug sense of superiority when we win. Rejoicing yes, but not gloating. And what about the second half of that verse: "*Mourn with those who mourn?*" When someone we care about mourns the death of a loved one, our hearts naturally reach out with love and we mourn with them, we share their sorrow, we listen to the feelings of loss, sometimes we listen to anger, and we share their tears. Yesterday, many of us watched the online memorial service for Rev. Dick Birdsall. There was celebration and there were tears. It's good to share them both. In this post-election period, what about those who mourn losing the election, and what it means for them? What would it mean for us to mourn with **them** as **they** mourn? To not avoid talking about it because we're afraid of a fight, to not write them off as losers, but to encourage them to talk about what the loss means for them personally- to listen, really listen without judging or correcting- what are they afraid of or angry about now (Do we know or do we just assume we know?) We'll never know unless we listen. Will we reassure those with whom we've disagreed that their concerns matter to us? What kind of difference could we make in bridging our nation's division if we Christians mourn with those who mourn this election? I believe it's important as we begin the work of bringing justice for all- including those who disagree with us.

Finally, in this post-election time, there will be a real desire to let "turnabout is fair play" be a rallying cry. It will be tempting to list the

horrible things that have been done and play “tit-for-tat.” “They did these things; we’ll show them.” Violence, looting, hatefulness, and destruction are very real possibilities in the coming days. Our legislators will also be tempted to play tit-for-tat games. “You prevented us from having our Supreme Court judge and forced us to accept yours; now it’s our turn.” Such words can feel like justice, but they are not. But human vengeance is not justice; it’s not guided by truth or wisdom or a desire for real justice; human vengeance is just taking what we believe is our rightful pound of flesh. Except it’s never satisfied with just a pound of flesh; human vengeance wants more. Human vengeance also never brings peace; it doesn’t bring peace inside us or in the world. Human vengeance just invites more vengeance and lets evil win. As followers of Christ, we are called to let **sincere** love be the measure of our lives instead; sincere love works to overcome evil with good and leaves vengeance to the Lord.

Friends, get ready, the coming days are going to be unsettling, as the lawsuits move forward, as the numbness of the unexpected loss wears off and the anger begins. Our nation needs followers of Christ and people of faith to be about the work of sincere love that overcomes evil with good, that rejoices with those who rejoice, and also mourns with those who mourn. Let’s get our hearts and minds ready for the days ahead, grounded by prayer and sincere love, so God can use us. It’s not a time to sit back and watch and fret about what’s happening; it’s time to hate what is evil, cling to what is good, and be a part of the healing work. In the words of Martin Luther King, Jr.: “Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.” May **our** love be sincere in these coming days and may **our** lights shine.