

I will have to admit that I am both excited and also feeling a little intimidated by preaching a sermon today. This all relates to preaching a sermon on the Sunday after the US election this past Tuesday. I am excited because I love to preach on Sundays after critical events have occurred.

I love to turn to the Scriptures and hear what they may have to say to events which impact us in some way. What is God's Holy Spirit revealing? So preaching a sermon today is exciting for me.

But preaching today is also scary as all get out for me. It's scary because I am preaching on a political topic and I know that this congregation is made up of people across the political spectrum. I have prayed and thought hard about this sermon. I have read lots of articles by people expressing a diversity of opinion on the results of the election. I have been in conversation with some of you this week and listened as you have shared your reactions to Tuesday's election of Donald Trump as president.

I think about the person who gleefully entered into the church building this week and shared with me their enthusiasm after Trump's election. They told me that they had prayed harder during this election than during any previous election. They admitted to me that Trump was not a perfect candidate by any stretch and that he had said and done some things that greatly disturbed them.

But they believed that God was going to use Donald Trump to do great things for this country. This person's reaction was similar to the reactions of some other folks as they posted their comments on Facebook. Some folks who are part of this congregation have been excitedly anticipating the leadership and policies that Trump will initiate when he assumes office.

These reactions to the election were very different from a couple of other folks who stopped by to talk to me because they were very upset after the election. One person said that after the election they felt the same way that they felt after 9/11. They felt an overwhelming sense of dread and fear about what was going to happen over the next 4 years.

One person told me that they had made an appointment with their doctor because their blood pressure had increased after the election and they wondered if there was a connection. I have also paid attention to the Facebook postings of some of you who have sought to make sense of something which has made you very sad and angry.

We are part of one congregation. Those liberals and those conservatives that you may like to talk about are fellow worshippers here at Allison Creek. They are your friends and they are your partners in your Christian journey. We are political liberals and conservatives who gather and worship weekly together in the same place.

We are liberals and conservatives who share conversations with each other in the fellowship time and in each other's homes. We sing and pray and study the Bible with one another. So how can we who are part of the same congregation have such divergent reactions to the election? What type of guidance can we glean from the Scriptures to speak to all of us at this time?

I decided to stick with the Common lectionary because I wanted someone else to be in charge of selecting the Scriptures that I would then try to listen to. I wanted to be open to God's word and not try to seek out Scriptures which would say what I wanted the Bible to say.

The next Scripture we will read was written during a time of deep sadness and depression for the people of Israel. It was written during the period of time when the people had been removed from their homeland of Jerusalem about 550 years before Christ was born.

Read Isaiah 65:17-25

As one author describes it, “the journey of God’s people had been long. Forcibly removed from their homeland of Jerusalem, driven to live in exile in Babylon for nearly seventy years, the people of Judah, the last remnant of God’s people are now, at long last, beginning their return home. They have such hope. Surely all shall be well.

And yet, in the years following their return, God's beloved people find out that all is not well. They are bone-weary exhausted from their exile, an exile whose losses and fears permeate their every breath, an exile that literally overturns the very ground of their being--family, land, temple, culture, life. Everything that they know has been overturned and they don’t know how to handle it. They are scared and they are angry.”

The fear expressed here in this passage by God’s people is similar to the fear that I have heard expressed by some people in our nation who attempted to let their voices be heard in this election. I am reminded of my family member who served as a faithful police officer for over 20 years but eventually left the police force angry because he felt that as a white male that the rules around him were changing.

This family member of mine began to feel as though he was a stranger in his community. He was tired of being stereotyped and judged as a white male. He voted for Trump as a sign that he had had enough and he wanted a different set of rules that were more fair and equal to him and others that he knew that played by the same set of rules.

The fear in this passage is similar to the fear expressed by the African-American woman in Flint, MI who lived by the rules and worked hard and paid her taxes only to discover that the water she was drinking and was sharing with her kids was poisoned. Her water was poisoned by the political decisions of people in the Michigan state government and she felt angry and betrayed.

She too felt that her voice was not being heard and she wanted people to correct a wrong that had been done to her that she did not deserve. She voted for Clinton because she felt that this candidate provided her the best chance to resume a normal life.

Two people who are political opposites but deep down who just want the same for themselves and their family. So what I think this election exposed is that we have a wide variety of people who simply want their voices to be heard but at present they feel ignored.

People voted for their presidential candidate because they believed that this was the best way to allow for their voices to be heard by others. Deep down the fear of the white police officer and Trump supporter in South Carolina is similar to the fear felt by the African-American woman and Clinton supporter in Flint, Michigan.

So what does this passage from Isaiah say to each of these people and therefore to us? This passage in Isaiah was written to fearful people. This passage was written to tell people to not lose hope. This passage was written to say to any of us that fear is not the way to a life of happiness. This passage was written to provide a reassurance of hope. That hope overcomes fear.

And what is the hope that this particular text provides? This text gives a vision where God does a new thing and creates something that has not existed before. In this vision to a people who are fearful and hurting God says the wolf and lamb will lie down together. In other words, in this vision from God the oppressor and the oppressed share oneness with one another.

Can you imagine what kind of pressure the wolf would get from its friends when it was discovered that this wolf was sharing company with a lamb? We can just imagine what his friends and family members are saying to this wolf. "Don't lie down with the lamb. Consume the lamb. The lamb is not like us and is do be devoured."

In today's political climate, this is seen when the ones who have assumed power and victory use this status to demean and tear down those they assume to be the losers. They group the losers into categories that they can say mean and hurtful opinions about because they are only categories and not real people with real pain.

But this passage also speaks to the lamb. The lamb is also told to lie down with the wolf. In today's political climate, the one who is the defeated is told to become one with the one in strength. But the lamb is told by its friends to not ever trust the wolf because the wolf is only out to tear lambs apart.

But this passage gives guidance to the lambs to not lump all supporters of the victorious candidate into deplorable categories. The lamb must be willing to listen to the individuals and hear their story and pain as well.

But the wolf and lamb must also be willing to call out the other wolves and lambs who are not willing to share community with the other. So the victorious wolf denounces language and actions from other wolves which is racist, sexist, and degrading. The lamb who feels vulnerable denounces violence and aggression and language and stereotyping from other lambs about the wolf.

In order for this image of peace presented to God's people to be realized, both the lamb and the wolf must be willing to acknowledge the pain and vulnerability of the other. Listening and seeking to understand the other is essential for the wolf and the lamb to overcome their animosity toward one another and be one together.

So I am going to leave you with a reminder. Those Clinton supporters that you may be saying stuff about are sitting in this sanctuary worshipping with you and you will probably talk to at least one of them today. Those Trump supporters that you may be saying stuff about are sitting in this sanctuary worshipping with you and you will probably talk to at least one of them today. When you say and make assumptions about a Trump or Clinton supporter you are making assumptions about people that are worshipping with you right now.

The new thing that God may be doing in our midst is the building of a new community where political foes are able to build strong relationships with one another.

If we take the initiative to bring people together rather than tear them apart with demeaning words then we may indeed live out the kingdom where the wolf and the lamb live together in peace. AMEN.

+++++

-Rusling, Julie, "A Holy Disruption: No Lamb Chops Tonight," http://day1.org/7535-julia_rusling_a_holy_disruption_no_lamb_chops_tonight

-Given: November 13, 2016 in Allison Creek Presbyterian (York, SC)