

Live Into Hope
Oak Grove Presbyterian Church
Pastor Bill Chadwick
November 13, 2016

Matthew 22:35-39 One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?"

Jesus replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'

Because we wanted plenty of time for our musical guests this morning I had planned to preach a very short sermon. Circumstances have made that impossible, so we may run a little long. And I understand that there is a football game at noon today. Please feel free to leave any time you need to do so.

Please pray with me. Living God, may the words of my mouth, and the meditations and thoughts in each of our hearts, be acceptable to you and faithful to Jesus, in whose name we pray. Amen.

All my sermons are intended for everyone, but some sermons are aimed more at certain groups than others. For example, sometimes I am addressing primarily those who are lonely. Some weeks I might be addressing those who are struggling with caregiving, or parenting young children, or who have experienced divorce, and so on.

Today I am addressing primarily those in distress over the election. No doubt a few of you are happy about the presidential election. If so, I hope you don't stomp out in anger during this sermon. If this election has taught us anything, it is that we have failed to listen to each other. Let us start now to do so.

I want to introduce this precisely. Please listen carefully. I'm going to give a sermon in response to the election. I have never done so before in 35 years of preaching. After some elections I was relatively pleased; after some deeply disappointed. But this is entirely different. Never before have significant numbers of my flock been absolutely devastated... and terrified... So my primary emphasis today is pastoral: to provide comfort...and hope.

Yet there will be some things that are "political." Now, there are some people who say that if politics are spoken of in any way from the pulpit, then that church should be taxed. But that's not how the tax law reads. What is forbidden is this: A preacher speaking on behalf of the church cannot endorse a particular candidate, but that's the extent of the restriction. See IRS Publication 1828. Donald Trump is no longer a candidate. Over the years you have heard me be critical of President Obama, particularly related to immigration policy and the use of military drones.

As most of you have heard me say before, it is impossible to be faithful to Jesus and not talk about politics. Preachers are charged to preach Jesus values. These include the treatment of the poor and powerless, care for creation, protection for women and for sojourners—"sojourners" is the biblical term, today we call them "immigrants." The word "politics" originally meant "the affairs of the townspeople." That's what Jesus preached about and what Jesus cared about, the affairs of the townspeople. Finally, Jesus died on a Roman cross, a fate reserved for political criminals.

This is not partisan. In the past few days I have talked with several of our church members who are Republicans and a family member who is a Republican, and every single one was dismayed at the election of Donald Trump.

Again, as you have heard me say before, I'm not a Democrat. I'm not a Republican. I am a member of the Jesus party. It is my intention that this sermon and every sermon comes from that foundation alone.

We have already heard thousands of words about the election and for some of you I am sure more words about it is the last thing you want to hear. Among my first thoughts Wednesday morning was, "I wish I weren't going to be in the pulpit Sunday. Why didn't I stay on the farm?"

But God has called me to preach and to be your pastor and it is a deep and holy privilege... I simply can't *not* talk about the pain and fear that so many of our Oak Grove family are feeling.

So, the election is over. Now what, for those in distress? First, we grieve. When my dad died, one of my parishioners said, "Just keep busy." Well-intentioned. But wrong. I didn't need to keep busy. I needed to take time to grieve. We need to feel what we feel, in order to begin to heal. And for me, this election feels like a death in the family. It's the first thing I think of when I wake up. I couldn't eat for two days. We need to grieve. We need to be together. We need to cry. We need to hug.

One of Mary Koon's pastor friends was offering baby kangaroo therapy. Her church literally had a live baby kangaroo for people to cuddle. How great would that be? I know that at our house our poor dogs have about had their hair rubbed off this week.

If some of you are not grieving, please take seriously those who are grieving...and those who are afraid. This past Wednesday night in our adult faith formation class we were scheduled to begin a conversation about a book entitled, ironically enough, *Love Wins*. But I knew a lot of people were not ready to talk about anything except how they were feeling, so I decided we would talk about that first. We never got to the book study.

One of our newer Oak Grovers Wednesday evening shared how scared she was for her wife, who was in Kentucky then, saying, "That's not a safe place." And her wife in Kentucky was so scared for her back here in Shakopee, that she phoned to tell her where the guns are kept... Sarajane Myers told how that day at Homework Connection,

as she was tutoring, the teenage Muslim boys were so frightened. Heidi Schuchman, who works at an international school, spent the entire day comforting children who were terrified. Nicole Mills, the executive director of Oasis for Youth, the organization housed in our building that serves homeless young people, reported that the kids were nervously asking if they are going to lose their healthcare. As were some of our Oak Grove young people.

So, first we grieve, and we comfort one another.

Now, let me share some positive things.

First, I have to keep reminding myself of this. I think it's very important. Though Trump ran a campaign based on fear and hatred, I have to believe that not everyone who voted for him did so on that basis. Many people just feel like strangers in their own country. And many are just so tired of the political elites running things. And some coal miners are hoping Trump will indeed bring back coal mining jobs. And certainly if I believed that every abortion was a murder, I would no doubt hold my nose and vote for the anti-abortion candidate. So, the point being, I know that all 55 million people who voted for him are not bigots and haters.

There *are* things to celebrate in this election: The first US House member born in Dominican Republic was elected and the first Latina US Senator was elected.

Two more states approved Move to Amend measures. This is the movement to overturn Citizens United, to help get corporation's money out of elections.

Which moves us into the category of "What do we do next?"

Certainly campaign finance reform. You are no doubt tired of me talking about it, but if money didn't run politics do you think that Hillary and Donald would have been our two candidates? Our democracy has been hijacked by wealthy individuals and corporations and until that is fixed, this is what we can expect.

The fate of the planet depends on campaign finance reform, among other measures. Certainly we need to redouble our efforts to reverse climate change and to insist that the federal government doesn't roll back the small steps that have been taken.

And, of course, we need to double down on our anti-racism efforts. One thing this election did is to dispel any optimism about the state of race relations in our country. On Wednesday morning, Pastor Jermaine, who is African-American, said, "I never expected Hillary to win. I grew up in Houston. I know what this country is like." Harsh words. Truthful words. Donald Trump ran an overtly racist campaign.* A vast majority of white voters of all levels, classes, and even genders came out to put Donald Trump in the White House. (Jim Wallis)

But let us stand with those who are afraid: people of color, Muslims, immigrants, LGBTQ folks, women.

And again, we need to listen to one another.

Oh, how we need to listen to one another. In the surveys a lot of people indicated they didn't know anyone who was voting for the other candidate. That is in my experience absolutely unprecedented! Proof of our increasing polarization.

We need to listen: Nancy Hauser, our organist, sent me an email this week. Here's part of it:

"...now would be the absolute worst time to turn our backs on each other. For my part I intend to do two things:

- 1) I will try to break out of my 'quiet and shy' mold to spend more time in conversation with my more conservative neighbors – for I think communication and education is absolutely key here.*
- 2) I will get more involved with our local service organizations.*

People will need our help. No matter who they voted for, they will need our help, and I will not turn my back on them."

Indeed, let us commit to listen to those of all political persuasions.

You know, on Wednesday I was thinking of postponing Salsabrosa, but parishioners cried out in protest. "We NEED to dance! Isn't that in the Bible somewhere? A time to dance?" And they were right. Now, the Salsabrosa Orchestra has folks from six different birth countries. I want to ask you musicians, "What can we do for you in the wake of this election to help you feel safe?"

(Response) So: let us stand in solidarity with those who are afraid. Let us work for justice. Let us listen.

And let us pray. On Monday morning I began my day by praying for Donald Trump. In my younger days it would have been a prayer to CHANGE HIM into my own image. But on Wednesday I simply prayed for God's blessing upon him, and I'll let God work out the details of that blessing. Milissa Carter's devotion at the Stewardship Committee meeting Thursday included a quote from Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the essence of which is that it is impossible to hate someone for whom you are praying. I have decided not to hate Donald Trump. And I have prayed for him several times a day every day since the election and I pledge to pray for him each day of his presidency. Will you join me?

My spouse, Kris Jacobson, on Wednesday lit a votive candle and made a promise to herself that each day for the next four years she will light a candle to say yes to love. She put the idea on Facebook and it has spread across the country.

Here's another simple, but profound thing. It comes originally out of World War II. In the Netherlands people would indicate their refusal to cooperate with the Nazis by wearing a safety pin on the underside of their collars or backside of a hem. People could surreptitiously indicate to one another who was a friend.

In 2016, people are wearing safety pins for similar reasons. Since Britons voted to withdraw from the European Union in June, the frequency of incidents of xenophobic abuse against immigrants and people of color has risen by more than 50%. Soon after the referendum, a concerned citizen identified only as Allison (@cheeah on Twitter) tweeted about a plan to support those targeted by racism. She would wear a safety pin to show people she was an ally; that she would help intervene in instances of antagonism.

The call to action went viral. People tweeted photos of their own safety pins along with pledges to stand with victims.

This week Americans also took up the safety pins. Trump's election has terrified millions of Americans whose ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, or disabilities render them targets for violence. As in the UK, allies wear safety pins as a visual reassurance to frightened groups of people: "We stand by you. We will help protect you. We are your friends." Our Social Justice Committee is handing out safety pins today and next week.

Now let me give you some more signs of hope.

When I was a young pastor in Stillwater I heard a speaker who was head of the social justice arm of our denomination. He was speaking to a small group of us from the presbytery and he said something I have never forgotten. He was talking about South Africa, and this was in about 1980. He said, "Our God is a God of Justice. Therefore, apartheid will not last." I silently scoffed at his naïve optimism. Apartheid was so deeply entrenched in South Africa. I was highly dubious that apartheid would disappear in my lifetime. But just 14 years later, Desmond Tutu was dancing around a ballot box.

Martin Luther King, Jr. declared, "The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice." Our God IS a God of Justice.

One of the most common commands in the Bible, appearing over 80 times, is this: "Do not be afraid." And we read in II Timothy (1:7) "...for God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and self-discipline." Claim that!

My friend Gwin Pratt, interim pastor of one of our partner churches, Presbyterian Church of the Apostles in Burnsville, told me earlier this week that he had a vision. It was 20 years from now. *Trump's election...had triggered such a reaction...that it had proven to be...a transformational moment...it had galvanized the country...and the world ..to resist greed and hatred and fear.*

...our country had turned a corner...and justice was in charge...and love was the default position...and the Earth was healing.

Let us live into that vision.

We celebrate already the countless responses of love in the face of hatred. As I'm sure most of you know, the morning after the election horribly racist graffiti appeared in many places around the country. Should we be surprised? One of those places was Maple Grove High School. Kids of color and Muslims in the school were understandably terrified.

But...that was not the last word: "Students of color who went to school (the next morning) were greeted by cheering students lined up to welcome them, and signs with messages like, 'Love always wins' and 'One world.'" Students covered a large rock with their own graffiti saying, 'Love will conquer all.'" (Star Tribune November 11, 2016)

So, my friends, while it is not a straightforward progression, I still believe the gospel hope, that ultimately love wins. That is the message of the cross and RESURRECTION! (My butterfly stole.) Ultimately, love wins.

We have holy work to do. The work of shalom.

This is the time for the followers of Jesus to be obedient: to love the Lord our God with all our heart, mind, soul and strength, and to love our neighbors as ourselves.

Yes, love our neighbors and...love our enemies, as Jesus commanded. Let us not hate, not even those who say and do hateful things. Let us not stoop to hatred.

I charge you to be Jesus...You heard me right. According to the apostle Paul, the church is the body of Christ. I charge you to *be Jesus* for this community and the world.

In the name of Jesus I charge you to bring to this world

...justice and peace...

...comfort and hope...

...light and love...

Because Love Wins.

Amen? AMEN!