

Warner Memorial Presbyterian Church

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John 16: 12-15

Romans 5:1-5

May 22, 2016

PEACE, HOPE, LOVE

Over the last number of months, there have been few, if any, political analysts who have correctly predicted which Presidential candidates would do well in the choppy waters of all the primaries and caucuses. No one is surprised that Hillary Clinton is about to win the Democratic nomination, but everyone is surprised at how well Bernie Sanders has done in challenging her. And all the pundits are shocked, perhaps even Donald Trump was initially surprised that he would win the Republican nomination. It seems as if the political analysts looked at various economic indicators and thought the electorate would respond differently than it has.

Yet, now these analysts are saying they all underestimated the amount of anger there has been in segments of the voters in the primaries. Some of that anger grew out of frustration with the political dysfunction we have been in, with a legislative branch and an executive branch that not only haven't gotten on the same page, but haven't been looking at the same book. There has been a sense of powerlessness that has grown. There has also been a sense of disconnectedness because in today's media market, those who are more liberal have their news sources that tell them what they want to hear, and those who are more conservative have their news sources that tell them what they want to hear. Those with varying views rarely listen to people who would disagree with them.

So in an environment of anger, powerlessness, and disconnectedness, those candidates who have stoked that anger through scapegoating Mexicans and Muslims, or big banks and campaign finance rules have helped fairly similar groups of people feel connected with a hope that their candidate would be a powerful president who would accomplish the things on their agenda. I wouldn't say that is the only reason these candidacies have done well, but it has been part of what has led to their fairly surprising success. My main point today is not to criticize presidential candidates. If it was, I would have plenty to add in criticism of Hillary Clinton's campaign. My point is that there are many in our society who could be characterized by a certain disconnectedness with society as a whole, and they have an anger that arises out of a sense of powerless frustration. And there are candidates who have sought to exacerbate those feelings to power their campaigns. I am not equating Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders – I am just pointing out some similarities that have led to their surprising level of success. I also would say that whoever is going to be our next president is going to have a difficult time addressing the sense of anger, powerlessness, and disconnectedness that exists in our society.

I may be getting myself into deep water here, but I would say that Mr. Trump and Senator Sanders each try to offer the prospect of peace, hope, and love. One sees peace coming about through scaring the rest of the world through vast military strength and another seeks peace through a disengagement from global conflict. Like many of the candidates, they each offer hope that addresses complex questions with fairly simplistic policies, in hopes that voters won't realize there isn't a real plan to pay for the changes promised. And there is a kind of love that is primarily for those who agree with the campaigns, but not for much of anyone else. Those here who support either of these two candidates may criticize how I have characterized their candidacies and their supporters. I would be glad for you to help me see how I went off track. However, I want to be clear – I am not telling you who to vote for or against. I address this because it is important for us to see that there is anger, powerlessness, and disconnectedness in significant parts of our society and probably some of those same feelings are here in our midst as well. What is needed is peace, hope, and love that can go beyond that which is offered by any mortal.

Today is Trinity Sunday. Our passage from the Apostle Paul's letter to the church in Rome mentions all three members of the Trinity, indicating that our three-in-one God can deliver a peace, hope, and love that go far

beyond what humanity can muster. There is anger that is longing for peace and there is a Prince of Peace who offers a way of deep reconciliation with God and humanity, with all from whom we have been estranged. There are plenty of things that lead to a sense of powerlessness. But through our God there is a fountain of hope that does not run dry even when suffering comes our way. There is a lot of disconnectedness, but we have a God, who in traditional Trinitarian terms of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is totally connected and whole, generating an unending love that not only melds the Godhead, but that can also connect us with God and with all who were made in God's image, which means everyone, including presidential candidates and their supporters with whom we might disagree.

For those whose political toes I have stepped on this day, I ask for your forgiveness for what may seem like a meandering stream of consciousness. My intent is to point all of us toward the One who can address our anger, powerlessness, and disconnectedness with true peace, hope, and love. Out of that kind of relationship with God, we then can engage the political process in healthier ways that would better meet the needs of all within our society and our world.

We get there by paddling in a stream of hope. Even when we see blight on either side, the stream continues to flow because it is a deep one. Sometimes its flow carries us along, sometimes we have to paddle a bit, but even in times of drought, there is a source that enables this stream to flow. After traveling for a while, we see another stream coming into the stream of hope. It is a stream of peace. There are times of calm on this stream, but peace and calm are not the same thing. This stream can lead us to places of conflict, but combined with the stream of hope, we can be carried through and beyond them. After we have gone a ways, we see yet another stream flowing into the combined streams on which we have been traveling. This is a stream of love. It may look weak to us at first, but it grows in strength as we move through its waters. Its current sometimes takes us where we never thought we would go, but we find that the trip renews us in heart and soul. The waters of these streams mix beneath us, at times giving us an adventurous ride. On such a trip, we never end up where we began, which is better than o.k.

We live in a setting where there is plenty that can lead us to be angry, sometimes legitimately so, sometimes not. There is much that can make us feel powerless even while we are disconnected with one another. But as those who have been baptized in the powerful name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we reconnect with who we are called to be as we travel the streams of peace, hope, and love. We may be enticed to go with the flow on other streams, but divine accompaniment guides and empowers us for a journey of peace, hope, and love. We may be surprised at the friends we meet and make along the way.