

What a year this week has been! As I take it all in, including our very polarized nation, I wonder how we as followers of Jesus are called to move forward. Or more specifically how are we to behave? I read a meme this week that stayed with me. A little girl and I'm assuming her mother are having a conversation. The little girl asks, "But what if they lose?" Her mother responds, "Then we keep fighting for the rights of all people." "And, if they win?" asked the little girl. "Oh dear girl," said her mother, "it's the same answer." Regardless of the outcome of the election, there is still work to be done. Paul's letter to the Ephesians depicts Christian life as a battle against cosmic and worldly powers that enslave humankind and darken our awareness and understanding. Christ has overcome these forces and now rules the cosmos, though not yet in a way that is evident to all. For the church in Ephesus, following Jesus looked like the Jews and the Gentiles being reconciled, making one new community. I'm sure that didn't always go smoothly either. Yet, they were taking their everyday life and relocating it "in Christ," which distinguished them as an alternative community from that of the world. Practices were given to help them live out this distinction. Let us listen now to some of those practices Paul gives the people in Ephesus but first let us pray. **PRAY.** Listen to a word from Ephesians, chapter 4, verses 1-6 (CEB).

I keep praying, "God of us all, God of us all..." I wonder sometimes if we have forgotten that God is God of us all and that we're one in Christ Jesus. Our politics shouldn't define us yet sometimes they do. Rather, our identity- our commonality- our salvation- our hope- our strength- is in Jesus Christ. Paul encourages the Ephesians to live as people worthy of the call they received from God. So what does that mean? In the first few chapters of

Ephesians a vision is laid out that God through the death and resurrection of Christ has created a new community out of warring religious cultures, who are passionately divided. This new community knows no barriers of race, class or gender; they are one in the Lord. The question unfolding now as we shift to today's scripture is how does this lofty vision play out in our lives as Christians? "Democracy, elections, government: all are phenomenally important, worthy of our attention and engagement. They are the ways we order our life together as we seek justice for our neighbors and work toward the kingdom of God. We must not neglect these systems. Yet they are the broken lights of God's righteousness. We work within them, yet we wait with hope for a new vision of God's just and merciful rule" (workingpreacher.org, Cameron Howard).

To live as a people worthy of the call, Paul writes, "Conduct yourselves with all humility, gentleness, and patience. Accept each other with love and make an effort to preserve the unity of the Spirit with the peace that ties you together" (vv. 2-3). When we respond to God's call, it means we work to make the world a better place for all people. For God put skin on and moved into the neighborhood out of love for the whole world- not just for a few. Love is the unyielding cornerstone of the Christian faith. It's difficult to call yourself a disciple if you don't **make the effort** to love or *make the effort to preserve the unity of the Spirit with the peace that binds us*. We're called to make *the effort* to do hard things; inconvenient things. **Love does NOT ERASE conflict or difference or disagreement.** It does not make everything into a kumbaya moment or dismiss someone's feelings or story. **NO, LOVE is the gate through which we enter into those imperfect relationships** to make peace, to be repairers of the breach. This doesn't

happen overnight. The divides are real in our country and they're just as real in the church. No, this living as people worthy of the call is a lifelong process; it is not a completed, one-time event. Maybe today we all need to be reminded of what our call is and what kind of community we are?! Are we a community of faith that recognizes and treats everyone as a child of God? In what ways do we share Christ's love? Are we willing, alongside God, to do the hard work of justice and peacemaking? How do we confess and recognize that not all of us come from privilege nor are safe from racism or bigotry or have to question where our next meal is coming from? Sometimes it feels as if we all don't live in the same America yet we worship together. It's difficult to think about accepting each other with love or making an effort to preserve unity when some of us feel as though we're often treated as less than human. Part of the reason I felt so strongly called by God to be your pastor here at Triune is because I've heard that this community of faith is centered around the good news of Jesus Christ, and grounded in worship and mission. I've heard that you're a faith community that welcomes and seeks relationship with the stranger, whether poor or affluent, and invites everyone to be fed, literally and spiritually. I've heard that this is a community of faith who values people who are not always valued by the world. Not that any of us have it all down perfectly, as we all are sinners, but we're willing to make an effort. I've heard that this community of faith looks a lot like what we imagine the kingdom of God to look like where people are welcomed as they are and where mutual concern and love slowly grow through a smile or a shared meal or in the work of Roundtable or the Circles program. It's hard to practice these things though when many of the ways we get to know one another have been postponed due to the pandemic. Now more than ever we

must remember that as Christ's body, we're all equal in God's eyes. Yet, the calling and work comes in the fact that in the world's eyes and unfortunately, sometimes in the church, we're not always treated as all being equal.

This election has elicited many emotions: there are a good many who are disappointed or devastated by the outcome and there are just as many who are celebrating or relieved. Even in our spectrum of emotions, we're all still one in Christ Jesus our Lord. In the church, unity is based not on agreement, but on mutual concern. And mutual concern begins with assuming that all are children of God. This mutual concern grows out of worshiping together, eating together, fellowshiping together, creating artwork together, and listening to one another. Paul points out that they- that we- have more in common than can be imagined as he stresses the "oneness" by naming seven things that are "one." Seven is the number of completion or wholeness: one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism and one God and Father of all, who is over all, through all, and in all (vv. 4-6). To live lives worthy of our calling looks like shedding the practices of alienation and hostility taught by this world and embodying the vision of reconciliation, peace and unity that is the work of God in Christ. It's not just what we do. It's what God does through us. Leaving behind the ways of this world is not easy to do. Reconciliation, peace, and unity sound even harder and at times inauthentic to even try to make an effort. When someone spews hate, it's really hard to sow love. It's hard to have hope when you live in despair. It's difficult to imagine these things when people are dehumanizing one another. It's difficult to imagine when not everyone

are afforded the same basic rights and so we continue as the prophet Micah suggests to seek justice, love kindness and walk humbly with God.

In what ways are we living as people who are worthy of God's calling? Perhaps we're praying for God's grace and mercy to wash over us as we make an effort to love? Perhaps we're making an effort in practicing the kind of unity that protects the most vulnerable, the disenfranchised? Perhaps we're using our God-given gifts to make a difference? Our mission at Triune is: ***To share Christ's love while meeting physical needs and providing life-changing opportunities to the disadvantaged.*** On Election Day we closed down at 3:00 so that the staff could go and vote. A few of us, who had already voted, stayed around to finish up some work. The phone rang around 4:00 and there was a voice on the other end desperate to pick up his disability check in the mail; however, the mail had not yet come for the day. I told Bobby that I would be there until 5:00 and this made him even more distraught. He hurried off by foot to the Post Office. They told him that the mail was en route, and he came back to Triune to pace back and forth on the sidewalk waiting for the mail to arrive. At about 5:00, Bobby saw the mailman's truck at a business down the street and he took off down Stone Ave. to see about his check. Pat and I knew that the mailman couldn't give him his check, and we waited for Bobby to come back to Triune's parking lot, and I prayed that the mailman would stop by. Breathless from running, Bobby began to yell at us. Apparently the young mailman had laughed at his request. Tired, frustrated, angry, scared and desperate, he yelled, "You both get to go home. I don't have a home. You don't know what it's like. This is my first check in seven months. You can't wait a little longer for the mail to come. I'm never sending my mail here again. Y'all

don't care about nobody." As hard as it was to hear Bobby's words, I heard even louder his pain. He was right. No, I haven't walked even five steps in his shoes. And I/we do care...or we make an effort to care. We may not be able to change how someone relates to us, but we can certainly strive to change how we relate to them. As I got into my car to leave, I prayed for Bobby and I thanked Jesus for showing his face through him. I asked for continued guidance and patience and then I prayed for the staff and people of Triune...a community where God is over all, through all and in all...where discipleship is messy, and where we all imperfectly make an effort to love as God loves.

We live in a world and worship in a church where people are hungry, disconnected, and hurting, especially people who aren't always recognized by the world as fully human based on the color of their skin, or their gender, or who they love or where they lay their heads or how they look or smell. Just because a new president is elected doesn't mean that there isn't continued work to do. Elections nor those elected can promise unity and healing nor can they save us, only Christ can do that. As the body of Christ, we're held together in God's love and grace, and we're sent out- called- to join God already at work in this world. Yes, we have work to do: life-giving, tiring, creative, dig in the dirt, lovely heart and hands kind of work. May we live as people worthy of God's call together as one body, even when it is hard and inconvenient, and may we fervently continue to pray for our country and her leadership, both locally and nationally. Amen.