



**"So Far As It Depends on You"**  
**Scripture – Romans 12:9-21**  
**Sermon preached by Gregory Knox Jones**  
**Sunday, November 8, 2020**

The election is over and the people have spoken. It was predictable that the President would not acknowledge the results and concede, but we live in a democracy – thanks be to God – and the people have said it is time to turn the page.

I confess I have suffered a mild disappointment the past few days. I have yet to hear one newscaster detail the prominent role Westminster played in Tuesday's elections. As you know, President-elect Joe Biden, has worshiped in our sanctuary several times, and our new First Lady, Jill Biden, is one of our members. And, Sarah McBride, who grew up in our church family, served as a youth elder, and is one of our storytellers. She has been a strong advocate of human rights and is now the first transgender person to be elected to any state senate. We are so proud of them and wish them the best.

Yet even if the media overlooks Westminster, it has been wonderful to hear the constant chatter about Wilmington, Delaware. The rest of the country has run out of excuses for not being able to locate us on a map! Maybe after all of this attention, when we type "Wilmington" into the Google search engine, it will stop coming up with Wilmington, North Carolina!

While there is much excitement around the world about Joe Biden's election – well, maybe not so much in Russia – we know there are tough challenges ahead: overcoming Covid-19, re-energizing the economy, caring for God's creation, and increasing opportunities for all people. Getting elected is one thing, governing is another. Achieving areas of agreement will be demanding, but if all of our leaders seek the good of the nation rather than personal gain – if they focus on the wellbeing of our people and not themselves – we can edge closer to those hallowed ideals our nation's founders had in mind.

We have stared at red and blue maps for days and we have heard endless commentaries about the red and blue division in our country. However, I fear that oversimplification implies we are to think of ourselves as two opposing armies fighting to destroy one another.

First, I hope we will keep in mind that there are not merely *two* views – one classified conservative and one labelled liberal. There are numerous subdivisions within each of those camps. And those multiple differences need not be divisive; they can be our strength.

Second, I hope we will remember that we are all on the same team. Our goal is not to defeat the other side; our goal is to work together to form a more perfect union.

Each of us is unique and views life from our own perspective. However, to avoid constant chaos and lawlessness, and to succeed as individuals we must concur on fundamental principles for our nation. If we fail to find common ground, and the divisions among us become too stark and long-lasting, the in-fighting will shred our bonds, our nation will crumble, and we will all suffer.

These days many hold up the most extreme positions of someone on the other side of the divide, then paint with broad brushstrokes everyone who thinks differently. One side is accused of socialism, the other side of fascism. Everyone on one side is a racist, everyone on the other side hates cops. Constantly exaggerating our differences overshadows the things we hold in common. It stokes the fires of discord and erases all desire for unity. Pursuing a course that insists on creating winners and losers sows seeds of destruction. Working for the common good is what builds a better nation and edges closer to the Kingdom of God.

The United States of America was founded on Biblical principles that everyone is created equal and endowed with the rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. We strive for the ideal of justice for all and we seek the general welfare. I pray we will draw ever closer to fulfilling those lofty words.

The election just completed has been intense. Passions stirred a record number of citizens to cast their ballots. Emotions continue to run high and divisions remain.

We can continue to highlight our differences in **bold font**, ALL CAPS, underlines, and added exclamation points!!!, or we can throw ourselves into finding the places where we agree on what will benefit all and diminish no one.

As people of faith, we have a critical role. Our ultimate allegiance is to God, not to a political party or a particular leader. However, if we commit to living as Jesus taught us to live, we can be a robust force in building a better nation.

What that entails is spelled out in today's Scripture reading. Paul says, "Let love be genuine." Keenly attuned to the ways of Jesus, Paul says that love must be the bedrock on which we construct our lives. But, lest we imagine that Paul is poised to dissolve into a soft-headed, utopian vision where everyone is sweet and endearing, he immediately resorts to fiery language. He says, "*Hate* what is evil, hold fast to what is good."

Hate is such an incendiary word. We often associate it with people who are out of control and out to destroy. However, Paul declares that people who follow Jesus should hate. We should abhor evil. If we seek to love as Jesus loved, we will despise injustice, violence, greed, and deception. Paul reminds us that part of what it means to do what is right and good, is to oppose what damages and destroys. We do not acquiesce to cruelty, bigotry, lying, and any action meant to inflict harm.

Yet, we must be on guard not to allow our animus toward evil to turn us into a hate-driven person. We dare not fight evil *with* evil. And in order to not succumb to dark forces ourselves, Paul immediately counsels us to "cling to what is good." Latch on to what is good.

Consider the ways Jesus battled dark forces. He struggled against those who oppressed the poor and overburdened the weak. He confronted those who thought laws were more important than people. He exposed

corruption and stood in solidarity with those treated unfairly. However, when he took on evil he did not arm himself with weapons of destruction. He fought evil with the arrows of compassion, truth, justice, and hope.

Paul says, "Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all." Today, many are so angry that they are determined to fight ill-will with more ill-will. Returning evil for evil may satisfy an urge to get even, but it escalates the animosity which only widens the gulf that is already too broad.

Knowing that we cannot control how others will treat us, Paul adds this piece of practical advice: "So far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all."

You and I are called to be agents of reconciliation. Where we find division, we are to do our best to heal and to unite. Whether hope or despair win the day will depend not only on political leaders but on how people like ourselves treat those with whom we disagree. It is vital for us to play a central role in mending the divisions that threaten to undo us. Whether our candidate won or loss, we have work to do. We can be trouble makers – or we can be peacemakers.

## Prayers of the People ~ Sudie Niesen Thompson

Eternal God —  
our help in ages past,  
our hope for years to come —  
this week has been filled with uncertainty.

We have endured restless nights,  
and anxiety-ridden days.  
We have vacillated between  
refreshing our news-feeds  
and tuning out broadcasts —  
desperate for both a breakthrough  
and a break.  
We have felt hopeful,  
discouraged,  
outraged,  
overwhelmed —  
sometimes all at once.  
We have sat in the not-knowing,  
and it has been hard.

And now that the election has been called,  
some among us are weeping,  
some are rejoicing,  
some feel relieved,  
some feel afraid.  
And many of us are stunned —  
stunned! —  
by how deeply divided we are.

As we turn our attention to the weeks  
and months  
ahead,  
we know in our heart-of-hearts  
that the real work is just beginning —  
the work of healing this fractured nation,  
of mending the tears,  
of stitching together the fabric  
of our common life.

God,  
before we called ourselves  
Democrats or Republicans,  
Conservatives or Progressives,  
you called us Beloved.  
In this time,  
when it is so easy  
to view the other side as enemy,  
help us remember  
that we are all your children.  
Give us the grace to  
affirm and celebrate  
the divine image in those  
with whom we disagree.  
And, as citizens of Christ's kingdom,  
call us again to his ministry  
of justice, reconciliation, and peace.

Fashion us into your people,  
and make each of us a channel of your peace.  
Where there is hatred, let us bring love;  
where there is injury, your pardon, Lord;  
where there is despair, let us bring hope;  
where there is darkness, only light.  
God, in the weeks and months ahead,  
open our ears,  
our minds,  
and our hearts  
to the experiences of others ...  
and help us open wide our arms  
to embrace them in love.  
By your Spirit,  
empower us to be helpers and healers,  
prophets and peacemakers,  
workers in your vineyard,  
and witnesses to your grace ...  
so that the land of the free  
and the home of the brave  
might look more and more  
like your kin-dom of love.

This we pray in the name of your Son, our Lord, and offer the prayer Christ taught us:

**Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen.**