

GOING DEEPER

May 25th to May 30th

Scripture Reading(s) for the week:

Romans 12:9-21; I Corinthians 12:12-26; Ephesians 4:1-16

A few weeks back, we did something here at St. John's that we have not done in years – we hosted two weddings on the same day. I officiated the first wedding and the second wedding was officiated by Congressman (and retired pastor) Emanuel Cleaver II. Feeling the need to be a good host for my colleague, I made sure Congressman Cleaver had a microphone, a place to sit quietly, and other things. While with him, we had a few moments to talk, and the topic of division came up. Acutely aware of the divisive nature of politics in America, the Congressman told me a couple of stories.

The first story he told me was about a past radio interview. During the interview he was asked what he thought about his Republican colleague, Sam Graves, not seeking re-election to the House of Representatives. Congressman Cleaver said that he will be losing a friend in congress. Asked what he meant, Cleaver commented on the fact that, although he and Graves were in different political parties, they were good friends, often dined together, had family events together, and more. The radio host found that fascinating. Cleaver then told me that he later talked with Congressman Graves, and he told him that his radio interview will probably get Graves in trouble with his constituents for fraternizing with the “enemy.”

The other story was about a luncheon that he hosted with clergy in Lafayette and Saline counties. He told me that the purpose of the luncheon was to see how he could help them in their mission work to their community. What could he do from his congressional position to empower communities of faith to meet the growing challenges in their context. For the most part he said the event was cordial however, there were a couple of pastors in the group who were hostile to his presence. They were caught up in the divisiveness of politics and culture. This made me wonder how division amongst Christians is helpful to the cause of Jesus Christ in 2026 America. Of course, the answer is obvious – it isn't. That being the state of things, what do we need to learn or even, reclaim so that we can have a faithful witness in this world.

I think the Apostle Paul was concerned about a multitude of things and one of those was the faithful witness of certain early Christian communities. While much of what he wrote was targeted toward the inner workings of these fledgling house churches, he also thought about their impact on the world. In a culture steeped in honor and shame, the Apostle Paul was trying to develop a culture of unity within the church that would impact the world beyond its walls. His letter to the Romans has been interpreted by some to be about the internal workings of their church. Paul is viewed as preaching about peace and unity within the community of faith. However, recent scholarship claims that Paul is encouraging the Roman Christians to get along with their pagan neighbors – to have a faithful witness built upon loving others, even their enemies. This is done by out “honoring” them through direct actions of mercy and good. Providing for those in need, practicing hospitality, blessing those who persecute, repaying evil with good, and more. Paul knows that there will be many times when living at peace with every

GOING DEEPER

other inhabitant of the street, let alone the city, will be impossible, but Paul summons Christians to make every effort in that direction.

John Wesley said, “Though we cannot think alike, may we not love alike? May we not be of one heart, though we are not of one opinion?” I think there is a lot of work to do to heal the divide within our country and there is a place for the church to promote that. I believe that the church (meaning each of us) must find its place in the gap, the divine middle, standing between our ideologies. It is in this middle that we diligently serve our neighbor regardless of political affiliation, status, or area of need. It is there that we admit that politics is not the answer. Rather, it is the love of God spread through people who firmly believe divine forgiveness and healing are the true answer. It is here that we seek the unity that is found in the bond, the love, and the Spirit of God for blessed are those who seek, above all else, unity with everyone.

I invite you to take time and read each of the scriptures above followed by reflection on the questions below. Consider what it means to work for divine healing and unity from the middle instead of a political side. Lastly, I pray that God bless the reading of God’s Word and the meditations of your heart.

Questions to Consider this week:

- **Monday:** What exactly are your political foes doing that is promoting the common good?
- **Tuesday:** What exactly is your side doing that is promoting the common good?
- **Wednesday:** What is the common ground between both sides of the political spectrum?
- **Thursday:** Believing there is a gap between the two, how do you see the church filling that unique void?
- **Friday:** What can we do to bring healing and unity to communities divided by false narratives and rhetoric?
- **Saturday:** How does the church represent God’s vision of unity instead of a political party’s vision?

Actions for the Week:

- **Head:** Assess your basis for believing that God is on the side of your political group.
- **Heart:** Consider the call of God to stand in the gap between, seeing the possibility of unity despite our differing opinions.
- **Hand:** Engage in conversations of listening and learning that can find potential for divine unity.

Prayer: Lord of grace and unity. We live in a world that continues to be divided. We perpetuate ways to distinguish ourselves from others at their detriment. As Christians we use the Bible to sponsor this claiming it is your command – “be in the world but not of the world.” Further, we align ourselves with political parties believing they are the vehicle through which your justice and truth will come forth. Have we abdicated our calling? Let us hear from you the divine call to be agents of unity in this world. Make us aware that it starts with our actions and interactions, particularly with our neighbors. Teach us to stand in the gap, cross the divide, and take the hand of even our enemies as an act of solidarity. Show us how to love as you loved and how to make love the center of all relationships. Amen.