

All the Prayers of God's People
September 15, 2020

The next couple of weeks our focus for prayer and devotions is on the political battles that are waging in our midst. Most people say the church should not be involved in politics, but politics have a way of working themselves into the church, as Jesus demonstrated with his walk to the cross. Our job, then, is to figure out how to approach them, wrestle with our emotions, and figure out how to refocus when we get lost in the mix of the news, anxiety, fear, and the sense of right and wrong/black and white.

The following are quotes from a Sunday School class we taught a couple of summers ago, by Adam Hamilton, *Seeing Grey in a World of Black and White*. We will discuss each reality we face in terms of our own response to this black and white mentality, the U.S.A., and our church faces. Hamilton says:

"Our desire for certainty, our need to be right, and our tendency to miss the point have conspired to keep Christians from experiencing unity, and instead have led to endless divisions within the Christian faith."

We've probably all been part of church drama over the years, here or somewhere else. Maybe it's a split, maybe it's one group against another, or maybe it's caused by deep-seated theological issues. One person feels one way, another a different way. What Hamilton rightly points out is the "need to be right" is at the heart of our disagreements. We may feel especially strong about any one position in this world, but what is it that is really "right"? If we are each trying to live into a Christly life, to do justly, love mercy and walk humbly with our God, then we are all in that centrality, "right". If we are all attempting to "get it right", in our church, in our politics, in our concerns, then how can it be a black and white, divisive issue? Christ calls us to focus on Him in all things, right?

Hamilton also says:

"One of the hallmarks of our tendency to sin is that we feel the need to criticize, we take pleasure in gossiping, and we feel qualified to make judgments, often with very little information."

How often have we opened our mouths a little too wide, only to stick our foot in it? When we criticize "the other", gossip about each other within (and outside) the church walls, and when we make judgements about one another's faith walks based on our own beliefs, Hamilton is arguing that this is actually a sinful reality

that we are embracing. I would argue that our goal of living into Christ is diminished by our own desire to have a status in this world (a.k.a. Sin) apart from God.

Hamilton also says this:

“The ideal is that your faith not be rigid and unpliable, but instead that it is capable of being stretched and remolded over time, and that your theological and spiritual life grows deeper and more mature with the passing years.”

Arguably, we all would agree with this statement. Our faith is being challenged, especially during this Covid reality. In fact, everything we know about faith and “going” to church to be close to God is being challenged. In our efforts at maturity in the faith, we are being forced to find new ways of embracing God and maturing, much more like the church of Acts, in small house churches. The church as we know it is being reshaped during this time so that over the coming years, we might more resemble the maturity of faith Christ would desire in each of us.

And finally, Hamilton also says this:

“We share the gospel with others because we believe the gospel is not just about heaven, but about having life even here on earth.”

I would add to this “but about having an ABUNDANT life here on earth”. This gospel is worth sharing. We share it with each other on Sundays in worship faithfully, it is God’s promise. We all want our friends, family and even strangers in our midst to have this abundant life. We may just disagree on how to acquire that life *and that is ok*. The gospel is full of moments where we are called to choose. It means that we each have a path to maturity and growth, each being called to work for an abundant life in Christ in whatever way the LORD requires. Our journeys will look different, by design. We are called to love one another, despite these differences. Can we do this, church, in the midst of this political divide in our midst? That is our question as we embrace the year 2020 and all of its changes. Our next message will be about how we can faithfully discern what our role is in living this abundant life, even amidst turmoil.

Let us pray.

Almighty and faithful God, you call each of us differently to live into the gospel. Thank you for your diversity in call, in Spirit, in gifts. We pray, Lord for your specific and individual gifts to be utilized fully in our midst. That abundant life may be available for all, through each of us Your children. Amen.