

Community Church of Issaquah

November 17, 2024

## Finding Hope in the Midst of Hopelessness

Rev. Vincent Lachina

If you will permit me, I want to drift a bit from the message I had originally written for today. I had originally wanted to talk about how rich and complicated it is to love others in the way that Jesus told us to do. The election of a few days ago put that thought in a mixer and it has been going around since. Like some of you, my anxiety leading up to the election was replaced with horror and disbelief. How could things have become so unbelievable? As you know, churches are not supposed to talk about politics, and I don't intend to violate that legal agreement. So please understand, this message isn't about politics. It's about how the church must step forward and widen its ministry to those who will be in the firing range of new policies and changes.

How am I supposed to love my neighbor as much as I love myself when I know that some of them chose to follow what I have seen as behavior and decisions that are the very contradiction of what I have believed and preached about how we as Christians are to adhere to those teachings that we have heard over and over in Sunday School, Bible Study, or Church. And here we have verses telling us to love even those who have chosen a path that seems to lead to total dark days for so many of us. I appreciate that both Matthew and Mark wanted to push that message of loving self and others, but for me, I am in the midst of struggle to do either at the moment.

It would be one thing if those who have moved to the opposite side of my loving them would only be a neighbor or even a stranger, but it is

more personal for me these past few weeks. My struggle centers on my four siblings, eleven nephews and one niece, all of whom made the decision to be a part of a cult following, even though I had shared my concerns about that. The result has been hurtful. My son and I are pretty much isolated and silenced now from the rest of our family. The divisions of the election are not solely centered in political parties, but in the lives of people who must choose one side or the other and live with that hurt.

Since the election, I've had numerous conversations with other minister friends, and the question seems to be common to each conversation – how are we supposed to address all these issues now? Yes, because we all have read from the Bible and have our favorite verses and passages, each of us came up with something different. I won't bore you with all the different choices. Here are just a couple to add to those we heard today from Matthew and Mark.

I shared with my family these verses, and then repeated them in several of my clergy conversations and with a very long and serious talk I had with my son and his family. Try this and see if you think anyone from the cult side paid attention to it. Are you familiar with Romans 16 verses 17 and 18? Let me read them for you:

*“I urge you, brothers and sisters, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them. For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naïve people.”*

The message seemed so clear to some but not all. And I continue to ask myself, “How am I supposed to love those who willfully choose to deny

the words of the Bible?” I am well aware that Jesus tells me to love others as much as I love myself, but I am in a struggle to do what the Scriptures say. There is certainly no desire on my part to participate in the hate-filled aggression and retaliation that we all witness daily. I want to be a good Christian, but I must be honest and say that at some times lately, I have fought internally to calm my anger and irritation which mirrors back at me and say, “You’re supposed to love everybody.”

The reality of today isn’t only about personal struggles with neighbors or family. One of the most common conversation themes from my clergy conversations was this: “It’s just hopeless.” I have to admit, there have been moments lately when that is one overwhelming feeling that creates a depth of sadness. I keep coming back to the words from the prophet Isaiah:

*“Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired and weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary and young men and women stumble and fall; but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength.”*

Hope in the Lord and you’ll get your strength back. I believe that. I just want to know when it’s coming back. I’m watching for it. I don’t want to dwell in a life of hopelessness because when I am in that kind of dark place, I find it hard to love myself and even harder to love others whom I have chosen to separate myself from.

Is America the first country to live in the middle of such divisiveness and hate? Sadly, no. It’s really hard for us in this day and time to imagine the circumstances that surrounded the lives of the Israelites

when Isaiah spoke this prophecy about hope. Once a powerful nation with strong leaders, Israel had become little more than a combat zone. Warring tribes on every side made life uncertain and fearful for these people who called themselves “God’s chosen.” It would not be long before the Babylonians came calling, destroying the sacred city of Jerusalem and taking its people into captivity. They were to become refugees in a foreign land with no hope of returning home.

Now does it strike you strangely that this new messenger, Isaiah, begins to preach this sermon all about hope. He sounds like the ancient originator of the Power of Positive Thinking, doesn’t he? It was a hard sell, though. Imagine sitting in a refugee camp and hearing your religious leader spouting his sermon on hope. “The future looks good.” “Help is on the way.” “Somebody with power is on the horizon.”

If you are like me, I would have been sitting there saying, “Yeah, sure. Look around here, brother, and tell me where there’s any hope.” We tend to be skeptical people waiting for some solid evidence that things will get better. That’s a natural reaction, and it’s called doubt. We all do it at times because it’s harder to see the bright side of things when you are in the middle of your darkest days. I have been there, and I would be willing to bet you have, too.

So how do we find hope in these situations? I can only speak from my own faith journey, but here are a few of the lessons I’ve learned along the way. First, before we can even find hope, we have to truly believe that a loving God would not leave us in our darkest hour. There will always be a way to find the light when we truly trust God to help us get to it. There have been previous times in my life when I have felt like I did after the election results. I was in my darkest hole. I have laid awake at night feeling as if there is no hope for me or my country. I find

it hard to see a way out of this darkness. But when I remember to trust in the loving God I found through my salvation, I can begin again to believe in my heart that I can make it through, and that my world will also.

The second truth I had to remember is that life doesn't always happen on my timetable. One of my favorite clergy buddies reminded me that things will change for the better, but not instantly, and perhaps not even during my life. So many of our life experiences and expectations happen slowly. Life takes time. But in our microwave age, we want everything to be ready and fixed in 60 seconds. The reality is, we all know that isn't real. It's just that we do not always have the patience to wait. We are too anxious to find an answer to prayer or a problem to "hang in there." We tend to be people of faith whose response is often, "What's taking so long?"

Don't you think that was the question on the minds and hearts of the Israelites who had been given this big promise of better days to come and a promised Messiah? Can't you just see one of the refugees ambling up to their spiritual leader and asking him, "Rabbi, what's taking so long?" And then hearing him respond, "Just wait. It will happen in time." We wouldn't be surprised if the refugee shook his head, turned away and muttered, "Yeah, sure."

The third lesson for me was the hardest to wrap my brain around. It's that verse we in Romans 13. "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." Could it be that before I could find hope, I needed to ask God to fill me with joy and peace? That can't be right. I should have hope first, then a big portion of joy and peace would come from that. Isn't that how it works? Obviously not. There's a hard

lesson to learn here. Until I came to a place where I could say, “Lord, I trust you” and began to find a sense of peace in knowing that God would see me through whatever happened, I couldn’t get to the ‘hope’ part.

In the midst of all this uncertainty and confusion,