

St. Paul's Anglican Church
Sunday after Ascension; June 2, 2019
John 15:26 to 16:4

The Rev. Tom Burr

For too many years now, the political party in power at the national level, has proclaimed words to this effect, "We are finally on the correct path and the errors of the previous administration are being corrected." Conversely, the opposition party offered a far different perspective, "Our nation is broken and we are in danger of a national crisis!" Who should we believe? We cannot be on the verge of prosperity for all and total collapse at the same time. As a group, our modern-day political prophets, otherwise known as elected members of our government, do not seem to be able to accurately assess the present, or predict the future.

In the days of the prophet Isaiah, the circumstances in Israel and Judah were similar. Israel was about to be physically destroyed by Assyria, and Isaiah strongly warned Judah to repent and return to God or they would be devastated. I believe our nation and the entire world would be wise to hear and heed this long-ago warning.

Isaiah's prophecy concerning Judah and Jerusalem was not just "hot air." They refused to seek God's forgiveness and continued to put their faith in themselves; consequently, in 586 BC, their destruction was completed by the Babylonians.

In the midst of his warning and chastising disobedient Judah, Isaiah presents a notion of a time when the "mistakes of the previous administration," faith in self rather than God, would be corrected. In our reading (Isaiah 4:2-6) he said, **In that day shall the branch of the Lord be beautiful and glorious, and, Jerusalem shall be called holy.** The **branch of the Lord** generally refers to the coming of the Jewish Messiah, who would be a "branch", or descendant of King David.

Jerusalem will once again be called holy because **the Lord shall have washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion.** Jesus the Messiah, the branch of the Lord, will have judged all of Israel; and the sins of those who remained faithful to God, or returned to Him, will be cleansed and their sins forgiven.

Many within the Jewish nation accepted Messiah Jesus during his earthly ministry, and many more continue to come to Him today, but we believe this national cleansing will not occur until the time of our Lord's return to judge the world.

So, though Jesus' death for our sins enables Christians to be called holy, we see in the gospel reading (John 15:26-16:4) that we are not free from persecution by those who would destroy us. Our Lord said after He sends **the Comforter, the Spirit of truth, he shall testify of me.** The Holy Spirit will continue to call unbelievers to our Savior by speaking the truth of the gospel.

But the Holy Spirit will not work alone because Jesus added these words to his disciples, **and you also shall bear witness.** It is in this witnessing, in speaking the truth that Jesus died for our sins, that Christians are persecuted.

Our Lord warned his disciples, **They shall put you out of the synagogues.** Many people have sought a new church or stopped attending all together because they disagreed with the theology of the preaching or the practice of the church leaders. This is a form of being "put out!" Preaching is storytelling; but it must be a true story, it must be based on God's truth found in Scripture. It is the responsibility of each congregation and denomination to ask for clarification of teaching they think may be incorrect.

Being **put out of the synagogues** was not the most severe of the persecutions Jesus foretold, He said, **the time comes that whoever kills you will think that he does God service.** Jesus fulfilled Old Testament prophecy and established a new relationship between God and all believers. Many Jewish leaders rejected Jesus' teachings and persecuted the early Church because they thought his ministry brought about undesirable change.

Change can be good or bad. As the Catholic Priest sat in his side of the confessional booth a young man entered the other side. The repentant fellow said, “Father, forgive me for I have sinned a great sin.” Not being able to see him, but recognizing his voice, the priest answered, “I know you have; I read all about it on Facebook!”

Our world is changing very quickly. I believe it is some of these changes that have divided our nation politically, socially and even within Christ’s Church; and these divisions tend to overlap. Have you ever heard someone say, “I am spiritual, but not religious!” I cannot presume to know exactly what anyone means by that, but I will tell you what it suggests to me.

Spiritual is defined as “intellectual refinement of thought and feeling.” Being spiritual is good; it can lead us to a mature understanding of our beliefs and life principles, and enable us to more effectively convey them to others. Religious is defined as adherence to a religion; for us it means adhering to Christian principles taught in the Bible.

I believe passionate division often occurs when spiritual people develop intellectual refinement of thought without taking into account the truth of Scripture. God’s word keeps us grounded in our faith enabling us to grow spiritually in the manner that the Holy Spirit leads us. It can prevent us from inventing our own truth or pursuing societies “worthy causes” that are contrary to God’s truth.

So, how are Christians expected to deal with political, societal, and religious division? Listen to the guidance given by St. Peter (1St. Peter 4:7-11) to early Christians who were being persecuted. He said, **above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins.** He told them to love one another; and your love will enable you to accept the minor differences of opinion held by fellow Christians. This assumes core beliefs are grounded in Scripture.

Our love enables vastly different personalities to go beyond mere coexistence and experience mutual understanding among

ourselves, and to present a true and unified Christian witness to the world. Our love coupled with our God-given gifts and talents empower us to speak the truth of Scripture, and as Peter said, **minister as of the ability which God gives, so that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ.**

Christians must lift each other up in prayer and band together seeking changes in government, society and the greater Church by raising the awareness of the importance of God's truth.

When more and more people love each other with the love that God has for each of us; and use our talents to serve Him as He calls us; and base our decisions and actions on the truth of his written and Holy Word, good things will happen.

That is how we are to deal with division in our government, in our society, and in our churches. That is how we will remain faithful in our service to God; that is how our actions will bring glory to God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Now unto God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, be ascribed all might, majesty, power, dominion, and glory, both now and evermore. Amen.

Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.