

LOVING YOUR NEIGHBOR IN AN ELECTION SEASON

A Four-Week Sermon Series by Rev. Stephen M. Fearing, M.Div., M.A.P.T.

About Rev. Fearing: Rev. Stephen M. Fearing is pastor and head of staff of Guilford Park Presbyterian Church (PCUSA) in Greensboro, North Carolina and co-founder of the [Clergy Emergency League](#), a grassroots network of clergy supporting one another and their congregations to resist white Christian nationalism. Currently, he is a doctoral candidate at New Brunswick Theological Seminary where his thesis is exploring collaborative congregational song as an under-utilized tool for preaching social justice while maintaining the unity of the church. In addition to his work and study, he is an aspiring hymnwriter and his hymns can be found at his website at www.stephenmfearing.com. He is married to Tricia, a child play therapist, and shares responsibility with her as chaos coordinators to their two young children, Hazel Grace and Windsor (Winnie).

About This Sermon Series: This sermon series is intended to be used around the height of election season. In my context, I'll be doing a version of this series straddling election day, with two services prior to November 5 and two services following. However, it can be adjusted to whatever timeline best fits your ministry setting. It can be lengthened, shortened, or adapted in any ways that are helpful for you and the people God has called you to serve. Each service has a liturgy including the following: Call to Worship, Confession, Assurance of Pardon, Prayer for the Day, Prayer for Illumination, Affirmation of Faith, Prayers of the People, and Benediction. Also included is a Communion liturgy that can be used at any point in the series. There are also hymn suggestions and some sermon prompts to help get those creative juices flowing!

Credit: Regardless of how you use and/or adapt this series, please include the following credit: "Liturgy by Rev. Stephen M. Fearing, 2024 | www.stephenmfearing.com"

Suggested Timeline:

- **Week 1** – “We Love Our Neighbor”
 - *Focus Scriptures* – Psalm 133 & Matthew 22:34-40
 - *Theme Snapshot* - **Psalm 133** reminds us that we are called to community and that it is “very good and pleasant” when we orient ourselves to that truth in God’s name. **Matthew 22:34-40** compels us to orient our worldview to the wellbeing of our neighbor.
- **Week 2** – “We Choose Nonviolence”
 - *Focus Scriptures* – Exodus 1:15-22 & Mark 6:29-31
 - *Theme Snapshot* - **Exodus 1:15-22** gives us examples of two women who subverted a violent tyrant and chose the non-violent path. Likewise, in **Mark 6:29-31**, Jesus responds to the political violence of John the Baptist’s murder by telling his followers to rest, to attend to their souls, to practice sabbath, so as not to add to the woundedness of the world.
- **Week 3** – “We Repair the Breach”
 - *Focus Scriptures* – Isaiah 58:6-12 & Acts 16:11-15
 - *Theme Snapshot* – **Isaiah 58:6-12** reminds God’s people of the fast that God chooses: worship practices that repair the breach and loose the bonds of injustice. In **Acts 16:11-15**, Lydia inhabited the “purple” space between cultures and led the members of the early church to cross barriers of all kinds.
- **Week 4** – “We Remember Our Calling”
 - *Focus Scriptures* – Micah 6:8 & 1 Corinthians 13:1-13
 - *Theme Snapshot* – **Micah 6:8** reminds us that no matter the political circumstances, our job description remains the same. **1 Corinthians 13:1-13** highlights what it looks like when we do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly in public.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|--|----|
| Week 1 Liturgy..... | 3 |
| Week 1 Introduction, Hymn Suggestions, and Sermon Prompts..... | 8 |
| Week 2 Liturgy..... | 10 |
| Week 2 Introduction, Hymn Suggestions, and Sermon Prompts..... | 15 |
| Week 3 Liturgy..... | 17 |
| Week 3 Introduction, Hymn Suggestions, and Sermon Prompts..... | 22 |
| Week 4 Liturgy..... | 24 |
| Week 4 Introduction, Hymn Suggestions, and Sermon Prompts..... | 29 |
| Communion Liturgy..... | 31 |

WEEK 1 – “WE LOVE OUR NEIGHBOR”

LITURGY

Introduction: *Welcome to the first worship service in our series "Loving Your Neighbor in an Election Season." This liturgy is designed to guide your community through a time of reflection and commitment to love and neighborliness, especially during the divisive period of elections. This service is an opportunity for us to reflect deeply on our call to love our neighbors, especially in times of division. As leaders, let us guide our community with compassion, wisdom, and a steadfast commitment to embodying Christ's love in all our interactions.*

CALL TO WORSHIP

Note: *We begin by acknowledging both the beauty and challenge of living in unity, as highlighted in Psalm 133. This call reminds us of the blessings that come when we choose to listen, practice love, and strive for unity, even when it feels difficult or impossible.*

How very good and pleasant it is...

Ps. 133

**when we live together in unity,
when we gather to break bread as neighbors,
when we choose to listen to one another,
when we practice love - publicly and without fear.**

How very hard and frustrating it is...

**when all those aspirations seem like a pipe dream,
when we've endured so many years of deepening divisions,
when we've seen families, friends, and churches torn apart,
when we've been pitted against our neighbor.**

How scary and fearful it is...

**when we don't know what to expect,
when we're not sure if breaches can be repaired,
when we struggle between advocacy and self-care,
when we wonder if it's all gone too far to be restored.**

How unbelievable and gracious it is...

**that despite all this, God ordains a blessing for us,
and dares to dispel upon us life forevermore!**

How very good and pleasant it is...

**that the oil running down Aaron's robes, spilling over his collar,
would spill into our lives, healing wounds that run so deep.**

Come, neighbors, for now is the time to worship.

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Note: *Our opening prayer seeks the presence of the Great Healer, asking for grace and peace amidst the noise and chaos of election season. It invites us to find solace in the Good News of Jesus Christ, who steps into our divides and holds us in our fears and hopes.*

Great Healer of Every Divide,
we are gathered in uncertain times to be held by a certain grace,
a grace that covers us like the dew of Mount Hermon.
As we gather in the closing weeks of yet another hectic election season,
may we - even for a moment - tune out the noise and nuisance, the din and doomscrolling,
to hear the Good News of your Son, Jesus Christ, who willingly stepped into the divide.
Hold us in our fear,
hold us in our curiosity,
and hold us in our hope for the day when it will no longer be neighbor versus neighbor,
but neighbor *with* neighbor. **Amen.**

Ps. 133

CONFESSION

Note: *In our confession, we admit our shortcomings in loving God fully and sincerely, particularly in the context of politics and societal divisions. We seek forgiveness for partial hearts, souls, and minds that have strayed from God's command to love.*

Trusting in the everlasting mercy of God, let us gather to confess our sins:

Gracious and merciful God,
 you teach us that the greatest commandment is to love you
 with all our heart, all our soul, and with all our mind.
Forgive us when we've given you partial hearts,
 choosing to care only for that which affects us personally,
 turning our attention from those who are crying for justice,
 and loving power over everything else.
Forgive us when we've given you partial souls,
 giving our highest allegiance to any politician,
 making idols out of any nation, flag, or party,
 and sacrificing the wellbeing of our neighbor for money, power, or privilege.
Forgive us when we've given you partial minds,
 allowing the rhetoric of election season to harden our hearts,
 casting aside truth when it doesn't serve our ambitions,
 and refusing to look at things from another person's perspective.
Hear our confession, O God, and receive it with your abundant compassion. Amen.

Matt. 22:34-40

ASSURANCE OF PARDON

Note: *We are reassured that nothing can separate us from God's love, not even the divisions and rancor of election season. Through the mercy of Christ, our sins are forgiven, and we are called to live anew in this truth.*

[water may be poured into the font if it is your practice to do so]

Neighbors, hear the Good News of the Gospel:

Rom. 8:38-39

division is nothing new to the Church, and it has yet to separate us from God's love.

Nothing can do that, not height, not depth, nor things present, nor things to come, nor even the rage and rancor of another election season can do that.

Friends, I announce to each of us, through the mercy of the Resurrected Christ, our sins are forgiven! **Alleluia. Amen!**

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

Note: *We ask God for wisdom and calm as we receive the message, reminding us of God's constancy as our refuge and help in troubling times.*

God of Wisdom,

Ps. 46:1-3

though everything seems to change around us, so fast and without warning,

calm our hearts that they may receive this good news:

that you are our help and refuge, a very present help in trouble.

Shelter us in your word, O God,

that we might receive both its comfort and its challenge. **Amen.**

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

Note: *This affirmation challenges us to recognize and embrace as neighbors those we may not agree with, including those with differing political views, difficult family members, and others we find challenging. It calls us to practice neighborliness, even when it is hard.*

We, the people of God, who are the recipients of grace and mercy through no merit of our own, choose to respond to that grace and mercy by reminding ourselves of our neighbors.

Therefore:

- **We believe the person who votes the other way is our neighbor.**
- **We believe the politician who stands for everything we're against is our neighbor.**
- **We believe the family member who we're not looking forward to talking with over the thanksgiving table in a few weeks is our neighbor.**
- **We believe the person who lives next door whose yard signs make us sick to our stomach is our neighbor.**
- **We believe the people the attack ads say we should fear are our neighbors.**
- **We believe the church member whose online posts make us roll our eyes is our neighbor.**

We believe that neighborliness might be the hardest thing we're called to do, but we do it nonetheless - at times messily, imperfectly, and awkwardly - because God calls it good and pleasant. Amen.

Ps. 133

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Note: *We pray for the strength to practice true neighborliness, which involves sacrifice and intentionality, non-violence and vulnerability. We seek guidance to act justly and love mercy, especially when it comes to voting and engaging in civic life.*

Gracious and merciful God,
neighborliness is hard; it requires practice, sacrifice, and intentionality.
Help us break beyond simplistic understandings of neighborliness, as if it's nothing more than the ability to have "polite" conversations without devolving into argument.

We give thanks for those who have gone before us who reminded us what *true* neighborliness looks like:

- The neighborliness of walking across a bridge, arm in arm, with the national guard, dogs, batons, and fire hoses on the opposite side...
- The neighborliness of stepping between a woman accused of adultery and a hateful crowd with stones in hand...
- The neighborliness of voting not only in our own best interests, but in the interests of the poor, the marginalized, and the oppressed...
- The neighborliness of choosing non-violence when our gut instinct is to lash out in hate...
- And the neighborliness of picking up our cross and walking the messy, painful path of discipleship...

We try, and we fail. But you can work with that. You can work with us, and through us.

As dual citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven and United States of America, we seek your guidance for the living of these days, and the voting of these elections. Give us a double portion of your wisdom to do the next right thing. Because we can't control what our neighbor chooses, but we *can* control how we *choose* to respond.

- When our blood pressure rises and the adrenaline courses through our veins, help us to rest.
- When we blink our eyes only to realize we've been doomscrolling for forty-five minutes, help us put down the phone.
- When self-righteousness hardens our hearts, help us practice vulnerability (with healthy boundaries!).
- When it is all too easy to give into despair, remind us that to do so never helps those who need justice.

As a faith community, hold us in your care as we seek to be faithful to you, our families, our friends, our neighbors, and our communities.

[Here may be included joys and concerns specific to your context]

We lift these prayers to you, knowing that when we don't know how to pray,
your Spirit intercedes on our behalf with sighs too deep for words.
Receive them in your mercy and hear us as we pray the prayer your Son taught us to pray,
saying: **“Our Father...”**

Rom. 8:26

CHARGE & BENEDICTION

Note: *The service concludes with a charge and benediction that sends us forth with a song of peace, the love of Christ, and the fellowship of the Spirit, empowering us to be vessels of healing and hope in our communities.*

May the God of all the nations
bring a song of peace to your lips
to share with a weary world
and neighbors near and far.
May the love of Christ
flow forth from your hands
to be vessels of healing
where the wounds run so deep.
And may the fellowship of the Spirit
guide the direction of your feet
and remind you that you are not alone.
Go in peace, neighbors. **Amen.**

WEEK 1 – “WE LOVE OUR NEIGHBOR”

INTRODUCTION, HYMN SUGGESTIONS, & SERMON PROMPTS

Scriptures: Psalm 133 & Matthew 22:34-40

Theme Snapshot: **Psalm 133** reminds us that we are called to community and that it is “very good and pleasant” when we orient ourselves to that truth in God’s name. **Matthew 22:34-40** compels us to orient our worldview to the wellbeing of our neighbor.

Hymn Suggestions:

- **“Help Us Accept Each Other”** (Fred Kaan, 1974). This hymn speaks directly to the theme of unity and acceptance, perfect for a service focused on neighborliness.
- **“O For a World”** (Miriam Therese Winter, 1987). A hymn that envisions a world where love and justice prevail, fitting for the reflection on societal divisions and the call to love our neighbors.
- **“The Church of Christ Cannot Be Bound”** (Adam Tice, 2005). This hymn speaks to the church’s mission to serve all people, echoing the call to love and serve our neighbors.
- **“They’ll Know We Are Christians By Our Love”** (Peter Scholtes, 1966). A straightforward and powerful hymn about Christian unity and love, ideal for emphasizing the theme of neighborliness.

Ideas for Sermon:

1. Unity in Diversity

- a. *Prompt:* Reflect on the beauty of unity described in Psalm 133. Discuss how this unity is not just an ideal but a divine blessing that God ordains when we live together in harmony.
- b. *Question:* How can we strive for unity in our community, especially during divisive times like election seasons?
- c. *Application:* Encourage the congregation to practice listening, understanding, and loving their neighbors, even when opinions differ. Highlight practical steps to foster unity, such as community dialogues and acts of kindness.

2. The Challenge of Neighborliness

- a. *Prompt:* Explore Jesus’ command to love God and neighbor as the greatest commandments. Emphasize that loving our neighbor is a reflection of our love for God.
- b. *Question:* What does it mean to love our neighbor in the context of political and social divides?
- c. *Application:* Challenge the congregation to extend love to those they disagree with, seeing them as neighbors deserving of compassion. Share stories or examples of individuals who have bridged divides through acts of love and kindness.

3. Confession and Forgiveness

- a. *Prompt:* Focus on the confession section of the liturgy, acknowledging how political rhetoric can harden hearts and divide communities. Discuss the importance of seeking forgiveness and striving to love with whole hearts, minds, and souls.
- b. *Question:* In what ways have we allowed political divisions to affect our relationships and our ability to love fully?
- c. *Application:* Lead the congregation in a time of confession and reflection. Encourage them to seek reconciliation with those they have wronged and to commit to loving more fully.

4. Living Out the Greatest Commandments

- a. *Prompt:* Reflect on how Jesus' summary of the Law calls us to prioritize love above all else. Discuss how this commandment is especially relevant during times of political tension.
- b. *Question:* How can we ensure that our actions and words during election season reflect the love of God and neighbor?
- c. *Application:* Provide practical advice on how to engage in political discussions and actions in a way that honors these commandments. Encourage the congregation to be mindful of their words and to seek to build bridges rather than walls.

5. Practicing Neighborliness in Hard Times

- a. *Prompt:* Discuss the difficulties of practicing neighborliness in times of deep division and the importance of persevering in this calling.
- b. *Question:* What are some specific challenges we face in loving our neighbors during election seasons, and how can we overcome them?
- c. *Application:* Offer strategies for maintaining healthy boundaries while still engaging in meaningful dialogue and acts of love. Encourage the congregation to find strength in God's love and to support one another in this challenging but essential work.

6. The Role of the Church in Promoting Unity

- a. *Prompt:* Reflect on the role of the church as a community that embodies the unity and love described in these scriptures. Discuss how the church can be a model of neighborliness and reconciliation.
- b. *Question:* How can our church be a beacon of unity and love in our wider community?
- c. *Application:* Encourage the congregation to participate in church initiatives that promote unity and service. Highlight opportunities for involvement in community outreach, interfaith activities, and advocacy for justice and peace.

WEEK 2 – WE CHOOSE NONVIOLENCE

LITURGY

Introduction: *Welcome to our worship service entitled "We Choose Nonviolence," where we explore the profound and courageous acts of nonviolent resistance and restorative rest through the lens of scripture. Our central texts, Exodus 1:15-22 and Mark 6:29-31, provide powerful narratives of how God's people are called to respond to oppression and violence.¹ In Exodus, Shiprah and Puah exemplify nonviolence by defying Pharaoh's cruel command, choosing to preserve life rather than destroy it. In Mark, Jesus instructs his followers to retreat and rest in the face of political violence, following the brutal execution of John the Baptist. These passages invite us to reflect on how we, too, can embody nonviolence in our actions and find solace and strength in God's call to rest and resist. Let this service be a time of deep contemplation and commitment to the paths of peace and justice.*

CALL TO WORSHIP

Note: *We are reminded of the courageous stand taken by Shiprah and Puah, who bravely defied Pharaoh's murderous command with a resounding "no." Similarly, in times of violence and turmoil, Jesus instructed his followers to reject the cycle of violence. This Call to Worship invites us to recognize the many forms of violence that permeate our world. It challenges us to resist the urge to contribute to this woundedness and instead stand firm in justice without resorting to violence.*

When Shiprah and Puah were instructed to obey the murderous command of Pharaoh,
they said "no."

Exo. 1:15-22

When Jesus' followers were tempted to respond to violence with violence,
Jesus said "no."

Mark 6:29-31

There are many forms of violence - physical, emotional, spiritual -
and when we, too, feel the need to add to the woundedness of the world,
we can say "no."

We can take a stand for justice and advocate tirelessly for our neighbor
without resorting to violence.

And so, today, may the people of God gather in the presence of the Prince of Peace,
as we say "no" to violence and "yes" to God's everlasting shalom.

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Note: *This prayer is designed to center our hearts and minds during the turbulent times of election season. It seeks God's grace to help us rise above the noise and division, focusing instead on the teachings of Christ and the call to love our neighbors.*

¹ With much thanks to Ched Myers' "Binding the Strong Man: a Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus" for the observation that Jesus' command to tell his followers to rest after John the Baptist's murder and his instruction to "shake the dust from their feet" when they encounter resistance stood in stark contrast to the coercive, violent tactics of the Roman Empire.

Gracious and Merciful God,
may we rest this day in the words of the late John Lewis who once said:
“Nonviolence is one of those immutable principles
that we cannot and must not deviate from.”²
We, your people, are weary from a world wrestling with division, anger, and animosity.
Help us to rest, as Jesus commands us,
that we may be repairers of the breach, and not deepeners of the divide. **Amen.**

Mark 6:29-31

CONFESSION

Note: *This prayer of confession draws inspiration from Victor Frankl's powerful words on the space between stimulus and response, where our power to choose resides.³ It calls us to reflect on the times we have failed to occupy that space responsibly, leading to actions that harm rather than heal.*

Victor Frankl once said the following: "*Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom.*"⁴ Let us confess before God and one another the times when we have chosen to ignore our responsibility to inhabit that space between stimulus and response so that our actions do no harm. Let us pray...

Gracious God,
when we're tempted to lash out and add to the woundedness of the world,
there is so much that we can do:
we can water a plant, do a guided meditation, go on a walk with a friend;
we can volunteer at a non-profit, donate to a cause that resonates with our faith;
we can see a therapist, practice playfulness, mindfulness, and rest;
we can read scripture, listen to music, recite a poem, or spend time with our family.
Forgive us when we tell ourselves the lie
that we're incapable of choosing nonviolence.
May we learn from the courage of Shiprah and Puah,
and know that standing up to bullies is sacred, dangerous work.
May we practice the wisdom of Jesus to know that caring for ourselves
is one of the ways we care for our neighbor.
It's so very hard, Prince of Peace. We need your help.
We need your forgiveness. We need your strength. **Amen.**

ASSURANCE OF PARDON

Note: *This prayer reminds us that just as God blessed Shiprah and Puah for choosing nonviolence, so too are we offered grace and forgiveness when we confess our shortcomings and seek a better path through Christ.*

[water may be poured into the font if it is your practice to do so]

² <https://www.azquotes.com/quote/1573354>

³ <https://brenebrown.com/articles/2022/05/09/creating-space/>

⁴ https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/viktor_e_frankl_160380

Friends, scripture tells us that when Shiprah and Puah turned from violence and refused the orders of Pharaoh, “God dealt well with them.” So, too, does God “deal well” with us when we acknowledge our faults and seek a better way. And so, hear the Good News of the Gospel: through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we are forgiven. **Alleluia! Amen.**

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

Note: *This prayer seeks God's wisdom and guidance amidst the overwhelming noise of election season, asking the Spirit to help us discern and embody the truth, justice, and kindness found in God's Word.*

There is so much noise, God of all Wisdom:
so much shouting, so much posting and retweeting, so many attack ads.
It can be difficult to sift through the cacophony
and hear your still small voice encouraging us
to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly.
May your Spirit open our hearts to the truth we can only find in you.
May your Living Word inspire us to stand for the truth that is you.
And may your Presence today transform us
into vessels courageously proclaiming that Truth. **Amen.**

Micah 6:8

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

Note: *We choose nonviolence because we are, first and foremost, rooted in our identities as belonging solely to Jesus Christ. This excerpt from the Theological Declaration of Barmen proclaims this truth boldly and was written in a context when the Church was being coopted by a political ideology of violence, military might, and fear of neighbor.⁵*

As Jesus Christ is God’s assurance of the forgiveness of all our sins, so in the same way and with the same seriousness is he also God’s mighty claim upon our whole life. Through him befalls us a joyful deliverance from the godless fetters of this world for a free, grateful service to his creatures.

We reject the false doctrine, as though there were areas of our life in which we would not belong to Jesus Christ, but to other lords—areas in which we would not need justification and sanctification through him.

⁵ Theological Declaration of Barmen (8.14-15)

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Note: *This prayer calls upon God to guide us away from tendencies toward violence, just as God reminded Cain of his choices. It seeks forgiveness and the strength to forgive, while lifting up prayers for the safety of all involved in the electoral process, gratitude for those who have fought for our voting rights, and hope for a peaceful and just outcome.*

God of Every Nation,
when Cain fumed at your acceptance of his brother's offering over his own,
you intervened and reminded Cain that he had a choice in his response.
"Sin is lurking at the door," you said, "But you must master it."
Help us, Gracious God, to be aware of our tendencies towards violence,
and empower us to do no harm in the name of your Resurrected Son,
who bore the burden and terror of political violence,
and chose to forgive, even upon death on a cross.
Help us to forgive those who have harmed us and our neighbors,
and forgive us when we have done that harm ourselves,
through what we've done and what we've left undone.

We pray this day for safety:

for the safety of all those who seek elected office,
for poll workers, civil servants, delegates, and law enforcement,
and for those who are tasked with making sure our elections
are free and fair exercises of democracy.

We pray especially this day for the safety of [*insert prayers for the safety of local candidates for political office on both sides of the aisle*].

We pray this day in gratitude:

for those who have died for our right to vote,
for those who sat at lunch counters, and refused to move to the back of the bus,
for those who lobbied, advocated, organized, and refused to give up,
for those who chose nonviolence to enact positive social change,
and for those who continue that sacred work to this day.

We pray this day in hope:

hope that all elected officials will accept the outcome of the results,
hope that those who lose will be peaceful in their response,
hope that those who win will be gracious in their victories,
hope that all elected officials would prioritize the wellbeing of
their constituents over and above party loyalty,
and hope that all will be well and all manner of things shall be well.⁶

We pray this day for [*insert personal/local petitions here*]

In all things, Gracious God, we give you thanks for calling us your servants, and calling us together as neighbors in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ, who taught us to pray, saying: **Our Father...**

⁶ Julian of Norwich

CHARGE & BENEDICTION

Note: *The service concludes with a charge and benediction that sends us forth with a song of peace, the love of Christ, and the fellowship of the Spirit, empowering us to be vessels of healing and hope in our communities.*

May the God of all the nations

bring a song of peace to your lips

to share with a weary world and neighbors near and far.

May the love of Christ

flow forth from your hands

to be vessels of healing

where the wounds run so deep.

And may the fellowship of the Spirit

guide the direction of your feet

and remind you that you are not alone.

Go in peace, neighbors. **Amen.**

WEEK 2 – “WE CHOOSE NONVIOLENCE”

INTRODUCTION, HYMN SUGGESTIONS, & SERMON PROMPTS

Scriptures: Exodus 1:15-22 and Mark 6:29-31

Theme Snapshot: **Exodus 1:15-22** gives us examples of two women who subverted a murderous tyrant and chose the non-violent path. Likewise, in **Mark 6:29-31**, Jesus responds to the political violence of John the Baptist’s murder by telling his followers to rest, to attend to their souls, and to practice sabbath, so as not to add to the woundedness of the world.

Hymn Suggestions:

- **“Make Me a Channel of Your Peace”** (Sebastian Temple, 1963). This hymn, based on the Prayer of St. Francis, emphasizes peace and reconciliation, aligning well with the message of loving one’s neighbor.
- **“For the Healing of the Nations”** (Fred Kaan, 1965). A hymn that prays for healing and peace, aligning well with the themes of nonviolence and justice.
- **“God of Grace and God of Glory”** (Harry Emerson Fosdick, 1930). This hymn asks for God’s wisdom and courage to face the challenges of violence and injustice with grace and nonviolence.
- **“O God of Every Nation”** (William W. Reid, Jr., 1958). A hymn that calls for God’s guidance in seeking justice, peace, and nonviolence in a troubled world.

Ideas for Sermon:

1. The Courage of Shiprah and Puah

- a. *Prompt:* Reflect on the bravery of Shiprah and Puah, midwives who defied Pharaoh’s orders to kill Hebrew newborn males. Discuss their nonviolent resistance as a powerful act of faith and protection of life.
- b. *Question:* How can we embody the courage of Shiprah and Puah in our own contexts, standing up against injustice and choosing nonviolence?
- c. *Application:* Encourage the congregation to identify modern-day “Pharaohs” and consider ways to resist nonviolently. Share examples of nonviolent resistance in history and today, urging the community to take a stand for justice.

2. Rest and Resistance

- a. *Prompt:* Explore Jesus’ call for his disciples to retreat and rest after the traumatic event of John the Baptist’s execution. Highlight the importance of rest as an act of resistance against a culture of constant violence and unrest.
- b. *Question:* How can we find and prioritize rest in our lives as a form of nonviolent resistance and self-care?
- c. *Application:* Encourage the congregation to create space for rest and reflection in their lives. Discuss practical ways to incorporate rest and Sabbath into daily routines as a means of sustaining long-term nonviolent resistance.

3. The Power of Saying “No”

- a. *Prompt:* Focus on the power and significance of saying "no" to violence and injustice, as exemplified by Shiprah, Puah, and Jesus. Discuss the strength it takes to refuse participation in harmful actions and systems.
 - b. *Question:* In what situations are we called to say "no" to violence and injustice in our own lives and communities?
 - c. *Application:* Challenge the congregation to identify areas where they need to say "no" to violence—whether physical, emotional, or systemic. Provide guidance on how to take a stand and support one another in these commitments.
- 4. Nonviolence as a Choice**
- a. *Prompt:* Discuss the concept of nonviolence as a deliberate, proactive choice, as seen in the actions of Shiprah and Puah and the teachings of Jesus. Emphasize the role of intentionality in choosing nonviolence.
 - b. *Question:* How can we make intentional choices toward nonviolence in our interactions, both personally and collectively?
 - c. *Application:* Offer practical steps for choosing nonviolence in everyday situations, such as conflict resolution, advocacy, and community engagement. Highlight the spiritual and emotional benefits of living a nonviolent life.
- 5. The Role of Faith in Nonviolent Resistance**
- a. *Prompt:* Reflect on how faith in God inspired and sustained the nonviolent actions of Shiprah, Puah, and Jesus. Discuss the importance of grounding nonviolent resistance in spiritual practices and beliefs.
 - b. *Question:* How does our faith inform and strengthen our commitment to nonviolence?
 - c. *Application:* Encourage the congregation to deepen their spiritual practices as a foundation for nonviolent action. Share examples of faith-based nonviolent movements and invite the community to join in prayer, meditation, and other spiritual disciplines that support nonviolence.
- 6. Healing Through Nonviolence**
- a. *Prompt:* Explore how nonviolence leads to healing and restoration, both for individuals and communities. Discuss how the actions of Shiprah, Puah, and Jesus brought about life and peace in the midst of violence.
 - b. *Question:* In what ways can we contribute to healing and restoration through nonviolent actions in our own lives?
 - c. *Application:* Encourage the congregation to engage in acts of healing and peacemaking, such as community service, reconciliation efforts, and support for victims of violence. Highlight the transformative power of nonviolence in creating a more just and peaceful world.
- 7. The Call to Nonviolence in Turbulent Times**
- a. *Prompt:* Reflect on the relevance of nonviolence in today's turbulent times, drawing parallels between the biblical narratives and contemporary issues. Discuss how nonviolent principles can guide us through political, social, and personal conflicts.
 - b. *Question:* How can we apply the principles of nonviolence to current events and challenges in our society?
 - c. *Application:* Provide practical examples of how to engage nonviolently with current issues, such as voting rights, racial justice, and community safety. Encourage the congregation to be proactive in advocating for nonviolent solutions and supporting organizations that promote peace and justice.

WEEK 3 – WE REPAIR THE BREACH

LITURGY

Introduction: *In the third week of our sermon series we turn our attention to the theme "We Repair the Breach." Drawing inspiration from Isaiah 58:6-12 and Acts 16:11-15, we are reminded of our sacred calling to mend divides and foster unity in a fractured world. Isaiah challenges us to engage in actions that heal and restore, emphasizing that our faith must be lived out through tangible acts of justice and compassion. Meanwhile, the story of Lydia in Acts highlights her role as a bridge-builder, uniting people of different backgrounds and beliefs around a common cause⁷.*

CALL TO WORSHIP

Note: *This prayer invites us to reflect on the power of the word "if," which can remind us of both the potential harm of our actions and the empowering possibility of making choices that build each other up. Drawing on Isaiah 58:6-12, it calls us to remove injustice, feed the hungry, and care for the afflicted, so that our light may shine in the darkness.*

“If” can be a scary word, reminding us that our actions can cause harm:

“If you hit your sister, then she will feel pain.”

“If you say that mean thing, then he will feel worthless.”

“If you tell that lie over and over again, then people might begin to believe it.”

“If” can also be an empowering word,

reminding us that we have the capability to make better choices,
ones that build each other up:

**“If you remove the yoke from among you,
the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil,**

**if you offer your food to the hungry
and satisfy the needs of the afflicted,
then your light shall rise in the darkness
and your gloom be like the noonday.”**

Isa. 58:6-12

Come, Repairers of the Breach, and let us be gathered before our Loving God,
who shows us in Jesus Christ that love is always the best choice.

⁷ With much gratitude to Rev. Dr. Leah D. Schade for this fitting metaphor in her book “Preaching in the Purple Zone: Ministry in the Red-Blue Divide” (Rowman & Littlefield, 2019). You can check out her blog at <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/ecopreacher/>

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Note: *This prayer calls us to emulate the example of Lydia, who thrived in a diverse environment, and Jesus Christ, who bridged divides through healing, teaching, feeding, and loving. It acknowledges the temptation to see our differences as irreconcilable but challenges us to pursue reconciliation with the same determination as Christ.*

Gracious God, as did your servant Lydia,
we too live in places of many viewpoints, beliefs, and backgrounds.
It's all too tempting to throw in the towel and declare those chasms irreconcilable.
But your son Jesus Christ refused to treat reconciliation as a pipe dream.
Instead, he stepped into the divide and healed, taught, fed, and loved.
Gather us this day that we might come together with the same goal:
to heal a weary world,
to teach the message of grace and love that you've taught us,
to feed others as you have fed us manna from heaven,
and to love others as you first loved us. **Amen.**

Acts 16:11-15

CONFESSION

Note: *Desmond Tutu once said the following: "If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor. If an elephant has its foot on the tail of a mouse and you say that you are neutral, the mouse will not appreciate your neutrality."⁸ This confession reminds us that avoiding hard conversations for the sake of "keeping the peace" is a form of privilege that must be confessed and abandoned if we are truly to be repairers of the breach.*

**Gracious and Merciful God,
forgive us for the moments when we've mistaken neutrality for peace:
for times we've stayed silent when we should have spoken out,
as well as for the times we spoke out when we should have listened.
Forgive us for the moments when we've chosen apathy amid the mess:
for times we've washed our hands of responsibility,
as well as for the times we've tried to control more than is ours to control.
Forgive us for the moments when we've chosen to hide from the work:
for times we've avoided hard conversations to "keep the peace,"
as well as for those times when we've had those conversations poorly.
Hold us in your mercy, Forgiving God, and turn not your face from us.
May your face shine upon us that we may be saved! Amen.**

Ps. 80

⁸ <https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/acref/9780191843730.001.0001/q-oro-ed5-00016497#:~:text=Desmond%20Tutu%201931-&text=If%20you%20are%20neutral%20in,will%20not%20appreciate%20your%20neutrality.>

⁹ For the Rush fans among us: "If you choose not to decide / you still have made a choice" ("Freewill")

ASSURANCE OF PARDON

Note: *This prayer draws from the prophet Isaiah's promise that God's guidance will make us like well-watered gardens, vibrant and ever-refreshing. It harkens back to the waters of our baptism, where we were cleansed and forgiven, setting us on a path to live anew in the name of the Resurrected Christ.*

The prophet Isaiah reminds us that God's guidance shall make us like watered gardens, like a spring of water whose waters never fail.
Through the waters of our baptism, we have been washed cleaned and forgiven our sins, that we might live a new life in the name of the Resurrected Christ. **Alleluia! Amen.**

Isa. 58:11

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

Note: *This prayer invites us to embrace the sacred art of listening, as exemplified by Lydia. During this election season, it challenges us to bear witness to the testimonies of others, especially those with whom we may disagree, and to recognize the divine image in every person. By choosing to see each neighbor as a beloved child of God, we open our hearts to the transformative power of God's word.*

Holy God, Lydia is introduced to us as a person who knew the sacred art of listening. Help us to bear witness to the testimony of others, especially those with whom we differ. Though we may not agree, help us to see your image in their likeness, Choosing to see first and foremost the beloved child of God in every neighbor. May your word speak to your Church this day, for we wait in wonder for its wisdom. **Amen.**

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

Note: *As we enter this election season, we are reminded of our sacred responsibility to reflect on the values that guide our actions and decisions. In a time marked by division and uncertainty, this prayer calls us to a transformative fast — one that challenges us to move beyond dehumanization and fear towards hope, truth, and compassion. Rooted in scripture, it invites us to engage in the profound work of justice, mercy, and community-building, emphasizing our collective calling as a Church to respond to the needs of the most vulnerable among us.*

We believe that God, the Creator, calls us to a particular fast:

**a fast from dehumanizing our neighbor,
a fast from weaponizing fear instead of inspiring hope,
and a fast from accepting easy lies instead of difficult truths.**

We believe that God, the Redeemer, leads the Church to sacred work:

**the work of loosing the bonds of injustice and freeing the oppressed,
the work of sharing our bread with the hungry,
and housing our neighbors who are homeless,
and the work of clothing the naked and satisfying the needs of the afflicted.**

We believe that God, the Sustainer, energizes our souls in difficult days:

to open our hearts to listen to our neighbors' stories,

Isa. 58:6-12

Acts 16:14

**to remove the yoke of all that burdens the least of these,
and to be repairers of the breach,
healing as Christ heals,
teaching as Christ teaches,
and feeding as he first fed us.**

**This we affirm;
this we believe;
and to this we hold ourselves accountable. Amen.**

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

***Note:** In this election season, we find ourselves navigating a landscape filled with division and differing perspectives. This prayer invites us to seek God's guidance in becoming a vibrant and vital family, committed to holy risk-taking, sacred discernment, and surprising grace. Together, we acknowledge the challenges of loving our neighbors in a complex world and the necessity of taking risks for the sake of justice and compassion. We ask for the wisdom of the Holy Spirit to help us discern the steps we must take in repairing the breaches that separate us. In doing so, we embrace the promise of grace that allows us to grow and transform, both individually and collectively, into a reflection of God's kingdom.*

Let us pray to God, that we might be a vibrant and vital faith family that is a place of holy risk-taking, sacred discernment, and surprising grace.¹⁰ Let us pray...

God of Holy Risk-taking, nowhere in scripture do you tell your people: "Go love everyone; it'll be easy!" Instead you say: "Go love your neighbor; and pick up your cross." Help us to be a place of holy risk-taking; for you are a God who has taken a risk with us. You came in the flesh, born into a messy world that's been fighting with itself for so very long. Your son ministered in places where neighbor had been turned against neighbor; and he rejected the false doctrine of the zero-sum game where one has to lose in order for another to win. Help us, your Church, do the risky thing instead of the safe thing; and challenge the status quo that only benefits the privileged among us. Remind us that love without risk isn't really love at all.

God of Sacred Discernment, bless us with a double portion of your Holy Spirit that we may be guided in wisdom for the living of these days. We know that we're called to be repairers of the breach but we just don't know how to get there sometimes. We're tempted to be daunted by the enormity of the world's grief, and sometimes it all feels like so much. Help us to take the next right step; to do the next right thing. Wherever we are in our spiritual journeys, help us display Lydia's courage to dare to discern how you are moving in our world and how we are called in the name of your Son to be healers of the divide and good news to those who are oppressed and marginalized.

God of Surprising Grace, your resurrection promises us that if all is not well then all is not over. Help us to forgive one another when we mess up, while holding ourselves accountable for our actions. Grant us the holy work of showing mercy as you have shown mercy to us and our neighbor. May the messy, imperfect, and life-giving discipleship ahead of us transform us ever more into your likeness, that we may be – in ways both great and small – a vision of your coming kingdom, here and now.

This we lift up to you, as we pray the prayer your Son taught us to pray, saying: **"Our Father, who art in heaven..."**

¹⁰ With much gratitude to Rev. Dr. Leah D. Schade for this triple description of "Purple Zone" church in "Preaching in the Purple Zone: Ministry in the Red-Blue Divide" (p. 75)

CHARGE & BENEDICTION

Note: *The service concludes with a charge and benediction that sends us forth with a song of peace, the love of Christ, and the fellowship of the Spirit, empowering us to be vessels of healing and hope in our communities.*

May the God of all the nations

bring a song of peace to your lips

to share with a weary world and neighbors near and far.

May the love of Christ

flow forth from your hands

to be vessels of healing

where the wounds run so deep.

And may the fellowship of the Spirit

guide the direction of your feet

and remind you that you are not alone.

Go in peace, neighbors. **Amen.**

WEEK 3 – “WE REPAIR THE BREACH”

INTRODUCTION, HYMN SUGGESTIONS, & SERMON PROMPTS

Scriptures: Isaiah 58:6-12 & Acts 16:11-15

Theme Snapshot: **Isaiah 58:6-12** reminds God’s people of the fact that God chooses: worship practices that repair the breach and loose the bonds of injustice. In **Acts 16:11-15**, Lydia inhabited the “purple” space between cultures and lead the members of the early church to cross barriers of all kinds.

Hymn Suggestions:

- **“Let Us Build a House”** (Marty Haugen, 1994). A hymn that calls for creating inclusive and welcoming communities, perfect for a service focused on mending divides.
- **“For Everyone Born”** (Shirley Erena Murray, 1998). This hymn celebrates inclusivity and justice, aligning well with the theme of repairing breaches and fostering unity.
- **“The Church’s One Foundation”** (Samuel John Stone, 1866). This hymn speaks to the unity and foundation of the church, fitting for a service about mending divides.
- **“In Christ There Is No East Or West”** (John Oxenham, 1908). A hymn that emphasizes the unity of all believers, transcending divisions and differences.

Ideas for Sermon:

1. The Call to Action

- a. *Prompt:* Reflect on Isaiah’s call for God’s people to engage in tangible acts of justice and compassion, such as loosing the bonds of injustice, feeding the hungry, and sheltering the homeless.
- b. *Question:* How can we, as a faith community, respond to this call and become active agents of healing and restoration in our own context?
- c. *Application:* Encourage the congregation to identify local issues of injustice and need. Create or support initiatives that address these problems, emphasizing that faith without action is incomplete.

2. Lydia as a Bridge-Builder

- a. *Prompt:* Explore the story of Lydia, who became a bridge-builder by opening her home and heart to Paul and his companions. Discuss her role in fostering unity and community.
- b. *Question:* How can we follow Lydia’s example in our interactions with others, especially those who are different from us?
- c. *Application:* Promote the importance of hospitality and openness. Encourage the congregation to build relationships across divides, whether they be cultural, social, or political, and to create inclusive and welcoming spaces.

3. The Power of “If”

- a. *Prompt:* Focus on the conditional statements in Isaiah 58: “If you remove the yoke... if you offer your food to the hungry...” and the transformative outcomes that follow.
- b. *Question:* What actions can we take that will lead to the light breaking forth like the dawn and healing springing up quickly in our community?
- c. *Application:* Challenge the congregation to commit to specific actions that align with Isaiah’s vision. This can include volunteer work, advocacy, or personal lifestyle changes that contribute to justice and healing.

4. Listening and Responding

- a. *Prompt:* Highlight Lydia's ability to listen and respond to God's message through Paul. Discuss the importance of being attentive to God's call in our lives.
- b. *Question:* How can we cultivate a spirit of listening and responsiveness to God's call to repair the breaches in our world?
- c. *Application:* Encourage the congregation to practice active listening in their daily lives—listening to God, to scripture, and to each other. Promote discernment practices such as prayer, meditation, and community discussions.

5. Faith in Action

- a. *Prompt:* Discuss how both Isaiah's call to justice and Lydia's hospitality demonstrate that faith must be lived out through concrete actions.
- b. *Question:* In what ways can our faith community put our beliefs into action to repair the breaches and foster unity?
- c. *Application:* Organize community service projects, support local charities, and create opportunities for the congregation to engage in acts of service and justice. Highlight the importance of consistent, sustained efforts in making a difference.

6. Embracing Diversity

- a. *Prompt:* Reflect on the diverse background of Lydia and her community, and how she brought people together despite their differences.
- b. *Question:* How can we embrace and celebrate diversity within our own community, and use it as a strength in our efforts to repair the breach?
- c. *Application:* Promote inclusion and diversity within the church. Encourage the congregation to learn about and appreciate different cultures and perspectives, and to work together towards common goals.

7. Reconciliation and Healing

- a. *Prompt:* Discuss the themes of reconciliation and healing in both Isaiah and the story of Lydia. Emphasize the importance of these processes in repairing the breach.
- b. *Question:* What steps can we take to promote reconciliation and healing in our community and beyond?
- c. *Application:* Encourage the congregation to engage in reconciliation efforts, such as conflict resolution, restorative justice initiatives, and support for those affected by injustice. Highlight the importance of forgiveness, understanding, and compassion in these efforts.

WEEK 4 – WE REMEMBER OUR CALLING

LITURGY

Introduction: *In the fourth week of our sermon series we turn our attention to the theme "We Remember Our Calling." Drawing inspiration from Micah 6:8 and 1 Corinthians 13:1-13, we return to the basics of our faith and remind ourselves that our calling as followers of Jesus does not change depending on who occupies the Oval Office, or any other place of government, for that matter. Ultimately, we are called to be bold practitioners of justice or, as Cornel West defines it, "what love looks like in public."¹¹ Though this specific liturgy is intended to be used in one of the weeks following election day itself, it can be adapted to fit your timeline and context.*

CALL TO WORSHIP

Note: *As we gather in worship this Sunday after the presidential election, we are reminded of the enduring truth found in Psalm 146:3-7. In a time marked by political tension and uncertainty, our hearts may be tempted to place trust in human leaders and their promises. Yet, the psalmist calls us back to the foundation of our faith—the steadfastness of God, who alone offers true hope and justice.*

“Do not put your trust in princes,
in mortals, in whom there is no help.
When their breath departs, they return to the earth;
on that very day their plans perish.” *Psa. 146:3-7*

**Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob,
whose hope is in the Lord their God,
who made heaven and earth,
the sea, and all that is in them;
who keeps faith forever;
who executes justice for the oppressed;
who gives food to the hungry.”**

Come, People of God, and be gathered in the good news that nothing –
no election, no victory, no loss, no change in power –
can ever change the source of our hope and our trust as Christians.

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Note: *On the Sunday after the election, your congregation will likely find itself in a complex emotional landscape. The results will have evoked a spectrum of feelings—gratitude and fear, hope and exhaustion—reflecting the diverse perspectives within your community. In the wake of a tumultuous election season marked by division and discord, we have engaged in difficult conversations and practiced the sacred art of listening. This prayer invites us to bring our full selves—our fears, longings, and weariness—before our Gracious and*

¹¹ <https://traffickinginstitute.org/incontext-cornel-west/>

Merciful God. It calls us to seek gentleness, both in our interactions with one another and in the way we hold our own emotions.

Gracious and Merciful God,
the election is over; some of us are grateful for the results, and others fear them.
There has been much name-calling, animosity, attack ads, and divisions of many kinds.
We've had uncomfortable conversations, practiced the holy art of listening,
and perhaps learned a thing or two about our neighbor with whom we differ.
To this space we bring our fear, our longing, our hope, our exhaustion,
and a plethora of other emotions that leave us so very tired and weary.
Hold us, God.
Be gentle with us as seek to be gentle with one another.
Be with us in this time of worship, that we may heal and be healed.
May the songs we sing and the scriptures we read and the prayers we pray
be an offering to you, pleasing in your sight. **Amen.**

CONFESSION

Note: *As we enter this election season, we are called to reflect on the profound words of Corinthians 13, which remind us that without love, our voices can become mere noise in a world already filled with division. This prayer invites us to pause and confess the instances when we have contributed to that noise, choosing words that deepen wounds rather than heal. In the wake of a contentious presidential election, we acknowledge our shortcomings—those moments when we have failed to embody the love and curiosity that reflects God's image in others. This is a time to embrace the difficult, vulnerable work of reconciliation and to seek true repentance.*

Corinthians 13 states: "If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels,
but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal."
Let us confess those times when we've added to the din of division,
choosing not to speak the truth in love, but in ways that add to the woundedness of the world.

**Holy and Merciful God,
the book of our life is filled with promises broken and promises kept;
angry words that were spoken when we should have wept.¹²
As we emerge from yet another divisive presidential election,
we tenderly lift up the moments when we've fallen short of your glory
and chosen to disparage our neighbor instead of practicing holy curiosity
of how your holy image is reflected in their being.
It's hard work, vulnerable work, and messy work;
and we regret the moments when we've chosen what is easy instead of what is right.
Hear our confession and lead our hearts to repentance,
that we might move mountains by sharing the grace you have given us.
Help us practice not a lip-service love, but an "I've got your back" love!
Meet us as we are, but never leave us as we were,
for we, your children, are ready to follow you, to pick up our cross,
and get back to the work of being repairers of the breach.
This we pray in your holy and strong name. Amen.**

¹² With much gratitude for this particular line from Sting's song "The Book of My Life" from his album "Inside."

ASSURANCE OF PARDON

Note: *As we navigate the complexities of this election season, we are reminded of the profound truth found in 1 Corinthians 13: that the abundant love we are called to share with one another flows from the boundless love God has first extended to us. In moments of doubt or despair, when we may feel that our actions—or inactions—have put us beyond the reach of divine mercy, let us remember this reassuring message: “You, friend, are not that powerful!”*

Neighbors, the abundant love mentioned in 1 Corinthians 13 is available for us to share with others only because it has first been so graciously shared with us. If you think that what you’ve done or what you’ve left undone is so great as to sever you from God’s mercy, I have news for you: “You, friend, are *not* that powerful!” The single most powerful force in all of creation is the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. And nothing – no, *nothing* – can ever separate us from it.

Hear the Good News of the Gospel: our sins are forgiven.

Alleluia! Amen.

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

Note: *In this Prayer for Illumination, we acknowledge the overwhelming noise that often drowns out meaningful dialogue and connection. In 1 Corinthians 13:1, we are reminded that it is all too easy to become a “noisy gong or a clanging cymbal,” succumbing to the temptation to shout, disparage, and dehumanize one another. Yet, we stand firm in the belief that while listening, loving unconditionally, and learning may be more challenging, they are far from impossible—especially with God’s guidance.*

God of All Wisdom,

it’s easy to be a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.

1 Cor. 13:1

It’s easy to disparage, dehumanize, and devalue.

It’s easy to give in to the violence of war and words, of lies and labeling.

It’s harder to listen. It’s harder to love unconditionally. It’s harder to learn.

Harder...but far from impossible.

If it is true that nothing is impossible with you, God,

Luke 1:37

then send your Holy Spirit to this place

that we may be transformed by your Living Word into new creations,

living and loving in your mighty and reconciling name. Amen.

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

Note: *This affirmation of faith calls us to embrace love—not as a weakness, but as our greatest strength. In a time often marked by division, we recommit ourselves to the qualities of patience, kindness, and truth that unite us as Christ’s disciples.*

**We believe that love is patient and kind;
that it is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude,**

1 Cor. 13:1-13

that it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth;
that it bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.
And though we live in a political environment that often tells us
that these attributes are weakness, we refute that lie.
For these things are indeed the source of our greatest strength as God's people.
We believe that in Christ's name, faith, hope, and love abide;
and the greatest of these is love.
That love is made manifest in our work not through our doing, but God's alone.
It is the foundation of our calling as Christ's disciples in a weary world.
We recommit ourselves to this ministry.
And though it is hard, we remind ourselves that nothing is impossible with God.
This we believe in the name of the Triune God. Amen.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Note: *In the aftermath of the presidential election, we come together as a community, acknowledging the mixed emotions that accompany the results. This moment calls us to unity in our shared mission to serve God and God's kingdom, regardless of political outcomes. We pray for President-elect _____, asking for wisdom and compassion in leadership, and for all newly elected officials to build up rather than tear down. In this interregnum period, we seek peace and respectful discourse, embracing our role as the Church in promoting reconciliation and healing.*

God of Every Nation, our nation has decided on its next president,
and there are those among us both pleased and disappointed at the results.
Unite us this day in our common calling to serve you and your kingdom,
a calling that does not change depending on any election or power or principality.
When one side wins, we're called to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with you. *Mic. 6:8*
When the other wins, we're still called to do the same.
We pray this day for President-elect _____,
and that [his/her] heart would be grounded in the search for the common good,
the protection of human dignity, and in the welfare of the vulnerable. *1 Cor. 13:1-13*
We pray for all newly elected officials,
that they likewise will use their leadership positions to build up instead of tear down.
As we enter this interregnum period between election day and inauguration day,
we pray for peace and that all would accept the results of a free and fair election.
We pray that any demonstrations, protests, and discourse will be peaceful;
for we've already seen too much violence in this country,
and we, your Church, are called by the Resurrected Christ to put down our swords.
And be with *this* church, that we may be voices of reconciliation and healing,
treating each other with respect and dignity
while advocating tirelessly for the most vulnerable among us.
May the scriptures that we've explored these past four weeks be written upon our hearts,
that we may take their wisdom from this place into the neighborhoods
where you call us to be your hands and feet.
[prayers specific to your context may be included here]
This we pray in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ, who taught us to pray, saying:
Our Father, who art in heaven...

CHARGE & BENEDICTION

Note: *The service concludes with a charge and benediction that sends us forth with a song of peace, the love of Christ, and the fellowship of the Spirit, empowering us to be vessels of healing and hope in our communities.*

May the God of all the nations
bring a song of peace to your lips
to share with a weary world and neighbors near and far.
May the love of Christ
flow forth from your hands
to be vessels of healing
where the wounds run so deep.
And may the fellowship of the Spirit
guide the direction of your feet
and remind you that you are not alone.
Go in peace, neighbors. **Amen.**

Note: This is another option for a charge and benediction that comes from our siblings in the Jewish tradition, a Talmud take on Micah 6:8.

Do not be daunted by the enormity of the world's grief.
Do justice, now.
Love kindness, now.
Walk humbly, now.
We are not obligated to complete the work;
but neither are we free to abandon it.
In the name of God the Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer,
may all of us, God's neighbors, say: **Amen.**

WEEK 4 – “WE REMEMBER OUR CALLING”

INTRODUCTION, HYMN SUGGESTIONS, & SERMON PROMPTS

Scriptures: Micah 6:8 & 1 Corinthians 13:1-13

Theme Snapshot: **Micah 6:8** reminds us that no matter the political circumstances, our job description remains the same. **1 Corinthians 13:1-13** highlights what it looks like when we do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly in public.

Hymn Suggestions:

- **“Love Divine, All Loves Excelling”** (Charles Wesley, 1747). A hymn that speaks of God's transformative love, reminding us of the enduring nature of our calling to love and serve.
- **“God, Whose Giving Knows No Ending”** (Robert L. Edwards, 1961). This hymn emphasizes stewardship and service, reinforcing the theme of actively living out our calling in the world.
- **“Live Into Hope”** (John Parker Huber, 1976). This hymn calls us to live out our faith actively, emphasizing our calling to justice and hope.
- **“The Summons”** (John L. Bell, 1987). This hymn invites us to follow Christ's call to service, aligning well with the message of embracing our mission regardless of external circumstances.

Ideas for Sermon:

1. The Essence of Our Calling

- a. *Prompt:* Reflect on Micah 6:8, which succinctly summarizes our calling as followers of God: to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God. Discuss how these principles remain constant regardless of political changes.
- b. *Question:* How can we embody these three core principles in our daily lives, especially in the aftermath of an election season?
- c. *Application:* Encourage the congregation to identify practical ways to act justly, show kindness, and walk humbly. Share examples of individuals or groups who exemplify these principles in their communities.

2. Love as the Greatest Commandment

- a. *Prompt:* Explore Paul's profound discourse on love in 1 Corinthians 13, emphasizing that without love, all actions and words are meaningless. Discuss how love is the foundation of our calling and the greatest of all virtues.
- b. *Question:* How can we ensure that our actions and words are rooted in genuine love, especially when engaging with those who hold different views?
- c. *Application:* Challenge the congregation to practice love in tangible ways, such as through acts of service, reconciliation, and compassionate dialogue. Highlight the importance of patience, kindness, and humility in interactions.

3. Justice as Public Love

- a. *Prompt:* Discuss Cornel West's definition of justice as “what love looks like in public.” Reflect on how Micah's call to do justice aligns with Paul's description of love.
- b. *Question:* In what ways can our pursuit of justice be seen as an expression of love for our neighbors and community?

- c. *Application:* Encourage the congregation to engage in justice-oriented initiatives, such as advocacy for marginalized groups, community organizing, and support for social justice causes. Emphasize that these actions are grounded in love.

4. Navigating Post-Election Emotions

- a. *Prompt:* Address the complex emotions that arise after an election, as mentioned in the liturgy. Reflect on how Micah 6:8 and 1 Corinthians 13 can guide us in responding to these emotions with grace and love.
- b. *Question:* How can we channel our post-election feelings into positive action that aligns with our calling to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God?
- c. *Application:* Provide space for the congregation to share their feelings and support one another. Encourage them to focus on common goals and shared values, using their emotions as motivation to work towards justice and unity.

5. The Transformative Power of Love

- a. *Prompt:* Reflect on the transformative power of love as described by Paul. Discuss how love can heal divisions and bring about reconciliation in times of political and social tension.
- b. *Question:* How can we harness the power of love to bridge divides and foster reconciliation within our community?
- c. *Application:* Encourage the congregation to participate in reconciliation efforts, such as community dialogues, peacemaking initiatives, and acts of forgiveness. Highlight the importance of approaching these efforts with a spirit of love and humility.

6. Living Out Our Calling

- a. *Prompt:* Emphasize that our calling as followers of Jesus does not change based on political outcomes. Reflect on how Micah 6:8 and 1 Corinthians 13 provide a timeless guide for living out our faith.
- b. *Question:* How can we remain steadfast in our calling to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God, regardless of external circumstances?
- c. *Application:* Challenge the congregation to commit to these principles in all aspects of their lives, from personal relationships to community involvement. Encourage them to find strength and guidance in their faith during times of uncertainty.

7. The Role of the Church in Promoting Love and Justice

- a. *Prompt:* Reflect on the role of the Church in promoting love and justice in the world. Discuss how the Church can be a beacon of hope and a force for positive change.
- b. *Question:* How can our church actively promote the values of justice, kindness, and love within our community and beyond?
- c. *Application:* Encourage the congregation to get involved in church-led initiatives that promote social justice, support vulnerable populations, and foster community unity. Highlight the importance of collective action and mutual support in living out our calling.

PRAYER OF GREAT THANKSGIVING

Introduction: *The following is a Prayer of Great Thanksgiving that can be used or adapted for the celebration of the Lord's Supper at your community during election season.*

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give our thanks and praise.

We praise you, God of Every Nation, for your wondrous deeds.

From nothing, you created all that is and called it good.

You call us good. You call our neighbor good.

You call our friend good. And you call our enemy good.

We do the hard, messy work of reconciliation because you first reconciled yourself to us, authoring all of creation and delighting in the work of your hands and your breath.

We stand in awe of all that you have done, and are doing, in your world, and we gather at your Table to lift up in gratitude our praise and wonder.

You called your people to be repairers of the breach.

Isa. 58:12

You called them to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with you.

Mic. 6:8

You called forth a nation to live together in unity and fellowship.

Ps. 133:1

And likewise you call us to orient our worldview to our neighbor,

Matt. 22:34-40

to choose nonviolence when we're tempted to lash out,

Mark 6:29-31

and to welcome people from diverse places and ideologies to seek the common good.

Acts 16:11-15

As we gather at this Table to remember your love for us and neighbor,

We join the chorus of everlasting praise, [saying/singing]:

Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might,

Heaven and earth are full of your glory.

Hosanna in the highest.

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

Hosanna in the highest. Hosanna in the highest.

As we gather in a time of particular division and discord,

we ask that your grace that finds us at this Table would be a grace that we share with our neighbor.

Your Resurrection is the single most powerful force in all of creation,

a force that demands of us our highest allegiance, our deepest trust, and our heartfelt longings.

Your Resurrection fills us with the joy of the truth that if all is not well, then all is not finished.

Ground that truth in our hearts, Gracious and Merciful Lord.

May it still our souls for the faithful living of these days.

Fill us with awe at the mystery of our faith, [saying/singing]:

Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again.

At this Table, God of Our Neighbors,
There is no Republican, there is no Democrat, there are only beloved Children of God.
Help us to receive the grace of this sacrament in gratitude,
and then go out into the world to share it in abundance.
For that is the fast that you choose:
that we would loose the bonds of injustice, undo the thongs of the yoke,
to let the oppressed go free, to share our bread with the hungry,
and welcome the homeless poor into our house.
When the political atmosphere seeks to divide us,
May the grace found at your Table remind us that together, in your holy Name,
We can, and will, be repairers of the breach, not because it is easy, but because you demand it.
You don't leave us to this task alone, but walk alongside us as a friend.
And so may this holy meal, shared in thanksgiving,
remind us that we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses,
cheering us along as we run this race.
This we lift up to you, Gracious Lord.
Amen.