

**The Sunday After the National Election**

**“We were made for these times”**

**Based on Philippians 4:1-9**

**By Rev. Ruth Ragovin**

**First Christian Church, Murray, KY**

**November 8, 2020**



Philippians 4:1-9 (NRSV): *Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved. <sup>2</sup>I urge Euodia [Ee-oh-dee-ah] and I urge Syntyche [Sin-tick-ee] to be of the same mind in the Lord. <sup>3</sup>Yes, and I ask you also, my loyal companion, help these women, for they have struggled beside me in the work of the gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life. <sup>4</sup>Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. <sup>5</sup>Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. <sup>6</sup>Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. <sup>7</sup>And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. <sup>8</sup>Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. <sup>9</sup>Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.*

A fight had broken out between two strong, independent, and assertive women, Euodia [Ee-oh-dee-ah] and Syntyche [Sin-tick-ee], who were the pillars of and dynamic leaders at the church Paul had planted in the city of Philippi. We can only guess what their disagreement was about (perhaps it was an argument over whether there should be a red or a blue carpet in the sanctuary), but a quarrel between two church leaders can potentially split a church right down the middle. Quarrels between people of two different political groups can split a country, especially when people draw lines in the sand and begin to vilify people as being “other” or “the enemy.”

While I am happy to report that we aren't busy fighting about the color of the carpets or anything else for that matter at First Christian Church in Murray, KY, and, indeed, people often exclaim that they sense a beautiful spirit of unity and spiritual health in our congregation, we cannot say this about our nation. Just as Paul was troubled by the two warring factions within the church at Philippi, we all should be deeply troubled by the viciousness of the present blood sport battle between the blues and the reds in our country.

Today, we find ourselves just days after one of the most divisive national elections in American history, which has lapsed into an unprecedented kind of mean spiritedness, accusations, plots, twists and revelations the stuff of which you can't even make up. People no longer are able to see each other clearly and charitably, no longer know where the truth actually resides, as we are at the mercy of the wealthy corporate controlled and manipulated media's caricatures of the candidates and their followers.

While we all knew that there would be ugly winners and ugly losers, while we all knew that whichever way the vote was cast the world would appear different the morning after, I don't think many people anticipated the extent of the strong emotion, insults, slurs, accusations, law suits, protests, and threats of violence. People on both sides of the political divide are concerned by the backlash.

As Christians who are brothers and sisters in Christ, as those called to put our faith in and allegiance to the Prince of Peace above party affiliation, we need to take very seriously that there are a lot of people hurting right now, remembering that when any member of the Body of Christ hurts, we all hurt. We need to recognize how many people are truly anxious and afraid.

We so often seem to be driven by our fear-based primitive reptilian brains where we are reacting at a tribal gut level rather than being able to rise above it to make principled

decisions. It is almost like the collective shadow side of our nation has emerged with its ugliness on full display for the entire world to see. I have received a number of emails and phone calls from family and friends in Canada and Germany who are simply aghast at the nasty partisan bickering from a nation that once was respected as a great moral world leader.

Unfortunately, so many of us have been sucked into this collective shadow side as we overly identify with either the red or the blue team that we actually begin to see the other side as the “enemy,” the bad guy, and no longer recognize the common humanity that resides within all of us and within each political party. We actually are so audacious as to believe that God is only on our side!

While the verbal warfare that has characterized the past year as the candidates have fought it out has been troubling, we should also be concerned about the way we regular folk have started to talk about other regular folk who are not on our political team. But perhaps big divide we should most worry about is not really that between the reds and blues but between those who, one the one hand, after the election, will continue to demonize, dehumanize, and refuse to see the other side as people worthy of respect and those who, on the other hand, are willing to try to set aside partisan differences and work for the common good and cooperate in a spirit of unity. We are at too critical a moment in history, and the United States is too important a leader in the world, for division and deadlock, egotism, immaturity, and self-righteous arrogance to continue to paralyze us.

Now back to our scripture for this morning. Paul was acutely aware of the dangers of division and infighting that were breaking out in the congregation in Philippi. It must have been a significant threat to the unity of the church because Paul, who was a master in conflict resolution, made a decision to address this conflict in a letter to the entire congregation. When we look at this scripture, we notice that Paul does not avoid conflict by somehow brushing it under the rug as though it wasn't happening. Paul, first of all, moves toward the conflict and talks directly to the people and parties concerned and urges them to talk directly to each other.

Secondly, and this is perhaps the take-away as related to our election, Paul doesn't start judging, labeling, and belittling. I like the way the Message Bible translates Romans 14:1. Paul writes: *Welcome with open arms fellow believers who don't see things the way you do. And don't jump all over them every time they do or say something you don't agree with--even when it seems that they are strong on opinions but weak in the*

*faith department. Remember, they have their own history to deal with. Treat them gently.*

Note that Paul does not for a single moment doubt the sincerity of either woman's efforts or faith! He says of Euodia and Syntyche that ***“they have struggled beside me in the work of the gospel ... [their] names are in the book of life.”*** Their names are written in the book of life! That is a powerful statement, isn't it! He reminds them of all the good work they have done together in the name of the Lord in the past. Paul is gently trying to help Euodia and Syntyche (and those who have aligned themselves behind them) to see each other as they really are, namely as children of God and sisters in Christ who share a common humanity. He calls upon them to take on the compassionate mind of Christ, in which we move from dwelling in or defaulting into negativity and judgment to refocusing our minds on that which is positive. As he says in this passage: ***Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.*** (Philippians 4:8).]

Like Euodia and Syntyche we so often lapse into negative judgmental thinking and fail to see people as they really are! We fail to recognize that each person is seeking to carry out the will of God in their lives and that of the church and that of society. We fail to see that we all are involved in the same struggles in life; we all want the same thing for ourselves and our children; and people normally are acting from a place of good intentions. We fail to see that, despite our differences, we really are all in this together.

Unfortunately, our national polarization and conflict has gotten so bad that many of us have started to lose heart. This is precisely what the devil wants! For when we lose heart, we give up. We lose our sense of agency. We no longer believe that we can make any kind of difference in the world. We might even doubt that God cares about us and the world. We forget that we are royal children of God who are empowered and strengthened by the Holy Spirit working within and that we can make a difference in the world! Were we not called and equipped by God for such a time as this?

Today I would like to share with you an essay written by the American poet Clarissa Pinkola Estes titled “We were made for these times” that has been a source of encouragement for me this week. While it was written many years ago, I believe it speaks directly to those who proclaim to be Christians during this critical moment in the life of our nation. Listen to her words as though it is a letter written specifically for you:

*“My friends, do not lose heart. We were made for these times. I have heard from so many recently who are deeply and properly bewildered. They are concerned about the state of affairs in our world now. Ours is a time of almost daily astonishment and often righteous rage over the latest degradations of what matters most to civilized, visionary people.*

*You are right in your assessments. The lustre and hubris some have aspired to while endorsing acts so heinous against children, elders, everyday people, the poor, the unguarded, the helpless, is breathtaking. Yet, I urge you, ask you, gentle you, to please not spend your spirit dry by bewailing these difficult times. Especially do not lose hope. Most particularly because, the fact is that we were made for these times. Yes. For years, we have been learning, practicing, been in training for and just waiting to meet on this exact plain of engagement.*

*I grew up on the Great Lakes and recognize a seaworthy vessel when I see one. Regarding awakened souls, there have never been more able vessels in the waters than there are right now across the world. And they are fully provisioned and able to signal one another as never before in the history of humankind.*

*Look out over the prow; there are millions of boats of righteous souls on the waters with you. Even though your veneers may shiver from every wave in this stormy roil, I assure you that the long timbers composing your prow and rudder come from a greater forest. That long-grained lumber is known to withstand storms, to hold together, to hold its own, and to advance, regardless.*

*In any dark time, there is a tendency to veer toward fainting over how much is wrong or unattended in the world. Do not focus on that. There is a tendency, too, to fall into being weakened by dwelling on what is outside your reach, by what cannot yet be. Do not focus there. That is spending the wind without raising the sails.*

*We are needed, that is all we can know. And though we meet resistance, we more so will meet great souls who will hail us, love us and guide us, and we will know them when they appear. Didn't you say you were a believer? Didn't you say you pledged to listen to a voice greater? Didn't you ask for grace? Don't you remember that to be in grace means to submit to the voice greater?*

*Ours is not the task of fixing the entire world all at once, but of stretching out to mend the part of the world that is within our reach.*

*Any small, calm thing that one soul can do to help another soul, to assist some portion of this poor suffering world, will help immensely. It is not given to us to know which acts or by whom, will cause the critical mass to tip toward an enduring good.*

*What is needed for dramatic change is an accumulation of acts, adding, adding to, adding more, continuing. We know that it does not take everyone on Earth to bring justice and peace, but only a small, determined group who will not give up during the first, second, or hundredth gale.*

*One of the most calming and powerful actions you can do to intervene in a stormy world is to stand up and show your soul. Soul on deck shines like gold in dark times. The light of the soul throws sparks, can send up flares, builds signal fires, causes proper matters to catch fire. To display the lantern of soul in shadowy times like these - to be fierce and to show mercy toward others; both are acts of immense bravery and greatest necessity.*

*Struggling souls catch light from other souls who are fully lit and willing to show it. If you would help to calm the tumult, this is one of the strongest things you can do.*

*There will always be times when you feel discouraged. I too have felt despair many times in my life, but I do not keep a chair for it. I will not entertain it. It is not allowed to eat from my plate.*

*The reason is this: In my uttermost bones I know something, as do you. It is that there can be no despair when you remember why you came to Earth, who you serve, and who sent you here. The good words we say and the good deeds we do are not ours. They are the words and deeds of the One who brought us here. In that spirit, I hope you will write this on your wall: When a great ship is in harbor and moored, it is safe, there can be no doubt. But that is not what great ships are built for.” (from the internet)*

We were built by God to be great ships. That is what we are and that is who our shipbuilder is! We are asked at this difficult moment to sail out into the stormy seas of our divided nation and assume our sacred responsibility as those commissioned by God to help heal our community and our nation. We are called by Jesus to raise our sails as peacemakers who work toward reconciliation. We are empowered by the Holy Spirit to reach out to anyone who is anxious and afraid, reassuring them that there is a place for them at the table, that they are safe, loved, valuable, worthy, beloved children of the

Almighty King of Kings as we help souls to awaken so that they might see the lighthouse shining out in the darkness of the stormy seas we sail on!

Finally, let us take to heart, be encouraged by, and trust in these words written by Paul to a people divided by conflict, when he said to them and to us: ***4Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. 5Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. 6Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 7And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*** (Philippians 4:4-7)

**Closing Prayer:** I close today using the words of this Old Breton poem by Winfred Ernest Garrison that was given to new submarine captains to give them courage in stormy seas and times of danger and which also was inscribed on a block of wood that President John F. Kennedy placed on his desk in the oval office:

*Thy sea, O God, so great,  
My boat so small.  
It cannot be that any happy fate  
Will me befall  
Save as Thy goodness opens paths for me  
Through the consuming vastness of the sea.*

*Thy winds, O God, so strong,  
So slight my sail.  
How could I curb and bit them on the long  
And saltry trail,  
Unless Thy love were mightier than the wrath  
Of all the tempests that beset my path?*

*Thy world, O God, so fierce,  
And I so frail.  
Yet, though its arrows threaten oft to pierce  
My fragile mail,  
Cities of refuge rise where dangers cease,  
Sweet silences abound, and all is peace.*

In Jesus' Name. Amen.