

Sunday January 26th How will we treat each other now? - revisited

Introduction:

Good morning friends, I want to express my gratitude to our elders for allowing me to share with our community this morning. I also want to say to some of our newer members who have been speaking to us, like Taylor, it is awesome to get to hear from you. If you have a message that you feel is for our meeting, it would be great to hear from you.

I also want to reflect on Ken's memorial service yesterday, and his brother's reminder of Ken's awesome sauce. For me, his secret sauce was genuine care and kindness for others, which all of us need in this season of life.

The title for this message comes from the fact that this is an updated version of a message I gave this time four years ago, on the Sunday after the previous presidential inauguration in 2020. It was also my first time returning to the meetinghouse during the pandemic and not long after the adoption of our daughter Mila. This is what I said to all of you then, and I think it is worth repeating.

On behalf of my family, which now includes our daughter Mila Rose, thank you for your prayerful support during our time as new parents. Some of you know that Krista and I have been on the adoption journey for several years. You have journeyed with us as we became foster parents, cared for the twins, Kylie and then waited for 18 months to finally have Mila come into our world. It has been hard, stressful, and full of heartaches and joys but so worth it. Mila has successfully had her cleft lip repaired which you can see on the screen, and she'll have her cleft palate repaired when she is about 1 year old. 2020 has been full of hard stuff but Mila has been a constant source of light for us.

I'll be candid with you, this election did not go how I wanted it to, and I am lamenting things that have already happened since the inauguration.

The core of this message isn't political but I do want to make a statement about politics. As a follower of Jesus, I worship neither political figure nor political party. Yes Jesus was political, but I think the light is more concerned with how we live and behave in the world more than our political party. I also think that the standards I hold political leaders to should be standards informed by my faith and the light that Jesus has stoked within me. I also cannot set aside my convictions and commitment as a follower of the light because I am talking "politics" or "business."

There are very few political leaders who are radiating light, and we could do with some light coming from Washington D.C.

I want to re-read the scripture that is central to my sermon today from the fourth chapter of Ephesians starting in verse 29: *Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. 30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 31 Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. 32 Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.*

I learned the definition of compassion when I did the first version of this message. It means "a feeling of deep sympathy and sorrow for another who is stricken by misfortune, accompanied by a strong desire to alleviate the suffering." I want us to hold that definition in our minds as we talk about this today. I am going to challenge each of us to treat the people in our lives that frustrate us most with compassion. To understand that each of us suffers in our own way, and I think that Christ is calling us to exercise compassion with those around us. Especially those for whom we can least imagine showing compassion toward.

This election season reinforced that we are a divided nation, and a divided Christianity. What I wish was true was that people who claim to be

followers of Jesus were known most for their compassion. For many people this weekend was not one that they celebrate but rather one that they are experiencing stress and trepidation about what the future may hold for them. Whether we can imagine that for ourselves, that is what some people are experiencing.

Krista helped me come up with a query that is appropriate for this time: "what have I learned about myself during this election season? How have I exercised compassion to those with whom I disagree? Am I more pleasant to be around because my candidate was the victor? Why?"

As I reflected on who is the ultimate example of compassion, I wanted to highlight someone who offered compassion to someone who had personally harmed them in profound ways, and who still offered that compassion to them. The story of Corrie Ten Boom is one of the most powerful living examples of this type of forgiveness and compassion.

Corrie Ten Boom was a Dutch woman whose family risked everything to assist Jewish refugees escaping from the onslaught of racism coming from Nazi Germany. She was trained as a watch maker and her family ran a legitimate watch making and repair business and their home served as a safe house for Jewish families seeking safety and asylum. In Corrie's bedroom there was a secret room built behind a false wall, essentially the size of a large wardrobe, in which six people could stand huddled and hide during Gestapo searches of the home. It was called the hiding place and eventually became the title of her memoir. If you haven't read it you absolutely must. In February of 1944 Corrie and her family were betrayed by a fellow Dutch citizen who informed on them to the Gestapo. Corrie and her sister were sent to Ravensbruck concentration camp; her sister perished but Corrie survived.

In 1947 Corrie found herself preaching at a church in Munich Germany and at the close of the service, a balding man in a gray overcoat stepped forward to greet her. Corrie froze. She knew this man well; he'd been one of the most vicious guards at Ravensbrück, one who had mocked the

women prisoners as they showered. "It came back with a rush," she wrote, "the huge room with its harsh overhead lights; the pathetic pile of dresses and shoes in the center of the floor; the shame of walking naked past this man."

I want to let Corrie tell this story herself, so let's listen to her talk about this experience herself. Here she is relaying this story:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qzHRD0N5ZhU>

Was there anything super human about Corrie? No, and while I can't speak for any of the rest of us I personally have never experienced any wrong in any level of magnitude compared to what Corrie suffered. Yet despite this she chose to act with compassion and treat this man well. It didn't mean she would allow him to do harm to her again, but she embraced God's forgiveness for what he had already done. I am challenged by this story and I think that all of us must learn some level of compassion, especially if we are a democrat frustrated by republicans, or a republican frustrated by democrats.

Which leads me to how this applies to us. We would be well served to follow Corrie's example especially in this post-election season. Regardless of political party, affiliation etc. We can always make a different choice. We should also be leading the charge to call for compassion in civil and political discourse.

Political conversations are hard, and they will probably stay that way. We can choose to disconnect, or take up Jesus' challenge to be compassionate difference makers in this world.

Whether your favored candidate won or lost, are you showing compassion and calling for your leaders to show compassion? Regardless of party affiliation, we should be people of compassion.

To wrap up I would like to share some ideas on how to handle hard conversations.

1. Create a hospitable and accountable community. We all arrive in isolation and need the generosity of friendly welcomes.
2. Listen deeply. Listen intently to what is said; listen to the feelings beneath the words. Strive to achieve a balance between listening and reflecting, speaking and acting.
3. Create an advice free zone. Replace advice with curiosity as we work together for peace and justice. Each of us is here to discover our own truths. We are not here to set someone else straight, to “fix” what we perceive as broken in another member of the group.
4. Practice asking honest and open questions. A great question is ambiguous, personal and provokes anxiety.
5. Give space for unpopular answers. Answer questions honestly even if the answer seems unpopular. Be present to listen, not debate, correct or interpret.
6. Respect silence. Silence is a rare gift in our busy world. After someone has spoken, take time to reflect without immediately filling the space with words. This applies to the speaker, as well – be comfortable leaving your words to resound in the silence, without refining or elaborating on what you have said.
7. Suspend judgment. Set aside your judgments. By creating a space between judgments and reactions, we can listen to the other, and to ourselves, more fully.
8. Identify assumptions. Our assumptions are usually invisible to us, yet they undergird our worldview. By identifying our assumptions, we can then set them aside and open our viewpoints to greater possibilities.
9. Speak your truth. You are invited to say what is in your heart, trusting that your voice will be heard and your contribution respected. Own your

truth by remembering to speak only for yourself. Using the first person “I” rather than “you” or “everyone” clearly communicates the personal nature of your expression.

10. When things get difficult, turn to wonder. If you find yourself disagreeing with another, becoming judgmental, or shutting down in defense, try turning to wonder: “I wonder what brought her to this place?” “I wonder what my reaction teaches me?” “I wonder what he’s feeling right now?”

11. Practice slowing down. Simply the speed of modern life can cause violent damage to the soul. By intentionally practicing slowing down we strengthen our ability to extend nonviolence to others—and to ourselves.

12. All voices have value. Hold these moments when a person speaks as precious because these are the moments when a person is willing to stand for something, trust the group and offer something they see as valuable.

13. Maintain confidentiality. Create a safe space by respecting the confidential nature and content of discussions held in the group. Allow what is said in the group to remain there. Do not post about face to face conversations online.

My simple exhortation to us this morning is to be compassionate to one another, and especially to those who test the limits of our compassion. This election season will reveal who we really are, and as friends of Jesus let’s reflect his example.