

I thought sure that you would all be flocking to my Bible Study this morning. After all, with the subject matter of this month's study "with the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other" there must be a **little** interest in what the Bible could tell us with regards to all the political news this week. (The choir, of course, gets a bye. They can't attend the Bible Study because of rehearsal.)

Is it that you all don't see a connection between the Bible and the current events? Or that being at church at 9 am on a Sunday morning isn't appealing. You do realize that Jesus was going through a difficult political situation in his time, right? The Jews were being ruled by an outside regime and the religious leaders at the time had no choice, they felt, but to kow tow to the Romans and become complicit in their schemes. They would have to hold their noses and hope that keeping the peace and doing what the Romans say would keep them out of trouble.

Jesus tells the Jews that they need to stand up for each other....not militarily...but by feeding and clothing the poor, caring about those in prison, healing those who are sick, and not letting a poor man with sores languish outside one's home.

There is much to dismay us all this week in our nation. And some of us feel angry, or disheartened, or stoic. Some of us are overwhelmed and have turned off the news (there's something wise about that) and some of us are glued to the Internet news or the TV or radio.

We are the Church of Jesus Christ. We are the Church of the WAY OF LOVE. Look at those prayer flags that our children made hanging in front of the altar. I asked them to send up a prayer to God in their flag. And what did each child write? LOVE, LOVE, LOVE...!

The parable today is about the prevailing notion that it's OK to ignore the poor in the streets.

We need to focus on ourselves and our happiness. It's every man and woman for themselves. And, unfortunately, much of politics today is that way too. I'm right. You're wrong. We must do this. No, we must do that.

I tell you that there's no amount of name calling, bullying, or shouting that will be a healthy solution to our government's problems.

And meanwhile, we shake our heads and groan and become at turns angry, despairing and incredulous. But, as Shakespeare wrote in the Merchant of Venice, “The truth will out.”

And meanwhile we remember LOVE. Love that is unselfish; serving others instead of self.

Jesus told us in no uncertain terms: “God so LOVED the world that he GAVE himselfto us.

And there we have it. Jesus GAVE himself. That might just give us a hint on what we are to do now. Presiding Bishop Michael Curry reminds us that our love is meant to be self giving. It’s not about me, it’s not about us versus them. **It’s about us.** If we are to be Church in this world, then we are to be people who Love each other, take care of each other and let others know that we do that too.

Pharisees have latched on to a particular part of the Hebrew Scripture which they interpret to mean that if they are wealthy it is because God has blessed them. The poor must be poor for a reason, they think. The poor are not blessed by God. The sick must be being punished by God, and that’s just the way it is. The poor must be unrighteous in God’s eyes and so God has decreed their fate. But we know that that is not true. Jesus tells this parable that we hear today, to warn us that how we treat each other in this world counts. We create heaven and hell for ourselves and for each other right here in this world.

The message of Jesus, and the true message of the law and the prophets is this: we are responsible for each other; for the poor, the sick, the orphan and widow. Abraham tells the rich man that he and his brothers could have listened to the prophet Moses and the prophets like Jeremiah who we’ve been hearing from all month.

But this is not easy. We get stuck in our patterns of behavior and we forget people who are in plain sight. The more we have, the easier it is to be distanced from the needy. It is our responsibility to bridge the chasm that has opened between us in our homes and the gate where Lazarus sits.

Lazarus provides for each of us a different challenge. Is it about us versus them? Or is it about us all who have a Higher Love who cares what we do with our time and our resources. Who is the Lazarus at your gate? He or she may be a person near where we live who is in plain sight, but hides his struggles for one reason or another.

- Is it the single mother or father who goes to a food pantry but conceals their need out of embarrassment?
- Is it the migrant farm worker who, because of his or her status, is afraid to ask for help ?
- Or is it the family next door who seem to be working full time, and doing fine, but unbeknownst to us, only make the lowest wage and are constantly falling behind.
- What about the residents at our local homes, Noble, Geer and Sharon Health Care, who silently wait for someone to visit, but seldom does anyone come by.

These people are in plain sight, they are at our virtual gate and we often are ignorant of their existence.

In this world what matters is our connections with one another. We all have responsibilities for each other because we all have God's blessings and gifts in different and various ways. We who follow Christ have a higher love than just taking care of ourselves or worrying about whose politics are right. Because of God in Jesus we have found that higher love. And that love guides us, bit by bit, into all truth, all care, all understanding.

Let's keep a "weather eye" on politics, but really LISTEN to Jesus. Let's listen to a song that many of us know and might give us a little better (peaceful) perspective on what really matters in life.

HIGHER LOVE (Steve Winwood. 1986)

Think about it, there must be higher love
 Down in the heart or hidden in the stars above
 Without it, life is wasted time
 Look inside your heart, I'll look inside mine

Things look so bad everywhere
 In this whole world, what is fair?
 We walk blind and we try to see
 Falling behind in what could be

Bring me a higher love
 Bring me a higher love (oh oh)
 Bring me a higher love
 Where's that higher love I keep thinking of?

(2 minutes of the chorus of the song is played.)