

***Finding a Way***  
**Preached by**  
**Rev. Lind D. Even**  
**United Church of Fayetteville**  
**July 2, 2023**  
**The Lord's Supper**

**For Reflection:**

*"Let us never forget that government is ourselves and not an alien power over us. The ultimate rulers of our democracy are not a President and senators and congressmen and government officials, but the voters of this country."*

Franklin D. Roosevelt

**Hebrew Scripture Reading:** *2 Samuel 5:1-5, 9-10*

Then all the tribes of Israel came to David at Hebron, and said, "Look, we are your bone and flesh. <sup>2</sup>For some time, while Saul was king over us, it was you who led out Israel and brought it in. The LORD said to you: It is you who shall be shepherd of my people Israel, you who shall be ruler over Israel." <sup>3</sup>So all the elders of Israel came to the king at Hebron; and King David made a covenant with them at Hebron before the LORD, and they anointed David king over Israel. <sup>4</sup>David was thirty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned forty years. <sup>5</sup>At Hebron he reigned over Judah seven years and six months; and at Jerusalem he reigned over all Israel and Judah thirty-three years. <sup>9</sup>David occupied the stronghold, and named it the city of David. David built the city all around from the Millo inwards. <sup>10</sup>And David became greater and greater, for the LORD, the God of hosts, was with him.

**Epistle Reading:** *2 Corinthians 13:11-13*

<sup>1</sup>Finally, brothers and sisters, farewell. Put things in order, listen to my appeal, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you. <sup>12</sup>Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the saints greet you. <sup>13</sup>The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.

**Meditation:**

***Finding a Way***

*Rev. Dr. Linda D. Even*

When I was in Israel in 1996, I received a certificate to record the fact that I had been in Jerusalem as it commemorated David's making the city his capital—the 3000<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the events recorded in our Hebrew Scripture text. At that time, Israel was almost a thousand years into its recorded history and was just concluding its first royal reign.

Saul was Israel's first king, designated by the prophet Samuel. His rise to king marked the end of the period of judges in Israel at the demand of the people, who wanted a king like other nations. They had God as their King and the Lord of hosts, but, somehow, they thought they would be better

off with a human king.

Finally, after the people nagged enough, God told Samuel to go ahead, but to warn the people of the problems they would face when they had a king like other nations: their sons conscripted for wars, their property consumed by taxes to sustain armies and palaces, their daughters to be workers for the chosen friends of the ruler, and would eventually find themselves slaves to the ever-demanding, ever-expanding needs of earthly royalty. If the people heard, they didn't care: "Give us a king." They got Saul, who was a successful chieftain and warrior before the demands of rule, of providing justice and leading armies wore him down. Amid internecine battles, critical evaluations of his kingship by Samuel as God's spokesperson, and David's own machinations, Saul died in battle.

While David had been designated by the aging Samuel as God's next choice for king of the tribes of Israel, that was, in fact, the third reason the chieftains indicated when asking him to rule. First, he was family, meaning he was more akin to the southern tribes than Saul has been; secondly, Saul had been too busy with other royal matters (and probably mental illness) to go out to war, so it was David who went instead.

David was Israel's second king. Under him the tribes of north and south would be united in one nation. It was also under David's rule that all God's warnings would come true: taxes, confiscation of property, conscription of people for war and labor, an enormous royal court and grand building plans to support. There would also come a day when scripture reported: "It was spring when kings went out to war"—David stayed home to watch a woman named Bathsheba take a bath. Soon the battles would begin again to consolidate power; to steal power; to retain power; to direct where power and extraordinary wealth would go after David's death and all the related complications that had nothing to do with serving the people. The nation's glory would fade not long after David's death, coming apart during the reign of his son Solomon. This time there would be two kingdoms—north and south—their rulers critically evaluated by their contemporaries as well as by history.

Israel's history is full of cycles of excitement about new leadership; possibilities for justice and peace; hopes that the new person will have none of the limits or foibles of his predecessor; hope and expectation that eventually crumbles into disappointment in the face of greed or illness, the complexities of governing, the costly demands of war and building programs; the divide between rich and poor; or simply human limits confronted by the demands of governing. What never seemed to change was the expectation that new blood, a new leader was the answer—as though all history pivots on the abilities of one or two people.

We are three thousand years away from those events, yet the story sounds strangely familiar. It is perhaps timely that we pay attention to it. We are only a little over a year away from this nation's 60<sup>th</sup> presidential election. We are also just three short years from celebrating this nation's 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

Governing any nation is never simple: governing ones filled with diversity of tribes, cultures, religions, ideas and disparities in opportunity redefines what it is to be challenged. Yet again and again, people and nations expect others (yet somehow not themselves) to do just that. Not so long ago, and in many ways very long ago, in a moment of frustration, responding to the myriad demands on his time, energies and skill set, a post-war Charles De Gaulle once asked, "Who can govern a country with two-hundred forty-six kinds of cheese?"

The world has become incredibly more complex—or it moves faster, or the news moves faster, or the world changes faster or people's expectations are greater than in De Gaulle's time, let

alone three thousand years ago. What hasn't changed is individual and group expectations that personal passions will be met on a national scale; that somehow all the personal passions can be balanced; but if not, then let them be mine or yours or hers or whoever has the most money or the loudest voice.

Preparing for this sermon, I wandered through Wegman's. Counting kinds of cheese there was like trying to count the stars in the sky. Of course, then or now, a varied diet (as opposed to some having more than enough to eat and others going to bed hungry) is not what makes governing a country complicated.

In the US last census, it was determined there are 320 million people here, falling into: seven categories of race and ethnicity including "mixed" and "other;" and more than 20 religious traditions (with all non-Catholic, non-Mormon Christian traditions counted as one—which can only be considered serious undercounting). It takes a much more detailed reading to discern things like number of registered Democrats or Republicans or Independents or Green Party members (let alone those who vote a straight ticket); those who are pro-literacy, working against the death penalty, for justice, for public safety, for the planet; hunger ministries; ending homelessness; education; responsible gun ownership; for or against same gender marriage; those who have no access to medical care and those who provide it; those with options for education and those who will never have an education; those whose faith guides their opinions about the nature of public life and those who object when faith does guide those decisions (at least others' decisions); the increasing divide between rich and poor and the devastating cancers of racism, hatred and gun violence that are tearing our nation apart.

The census doesn't record who wants to fly the flag and who wants to burn it; who has fought under it and who has objected to its wars; it doesn't even record how many think we ought to sing a national hymn in church today.

Nor does it reveal the truth that even the small group of people in this room do not agree on any of these issues, let alone all of them. Nor will it reveal what we know to be the equally untidy truth – that no person can be "analyzed" in all categories by knowing where they fall in one. There is no census count that demonstrates how polarized we have become—how our attitudes hardened along lines of personal passion and if you are not for what I am for then you are against me. There are currently sixteen declared candidates for the US presidency—a slate which only hints at the divides in our nation which need to be healed.

It is not only in our nation that the world as we have known it is shifting on its axes. We are living in unprecedented times, especially for those of us who have not lived through a war or a depression; sadly, we have added an international health crisis to our experience. We are living in a time when a nation most of the First World didn't think much of and thought its president was a lightweight fool, teach the world about democracy and courage. We are living in a time when the nation De Gaulle struggled to rule, a nation we have generally viewed as stable, is coming apart at the seams. We are living in a time where there are ever shifting national alliances, not based on shared goals, but on shared enemies.

So that nothing I have said so far is misconstrued, let me point out that while I have my own passions and perspectives on all these issues, I have not uttered them here or named names. My training is such that it is not my role in the pulpit to when people do not have the opportunity to respond or engage in discussion. There are other perspectives and training which I respect, but they are not mine. I try to be careful of that because I hope people hear what I am led to say, not something I didn't say; and because I am extremely respectful of the power of the pulpit. It is my

role, and the role of the church, to remind us of our enduring faith identity: the certainty that we are ever and always the citizens of two kingdoms—on earth and in heaven—and have responsibilities to both.

In that light, let me take a moment to remind us of two things:

1) History shows again and again that people get what they ask for. To cast a vote is not to absolve ourselves from responsibility for recognizing that, just as we are the church, we are the nation. It is not some "other entity." To the degree that we ask for a refusal to compromise on issues important to us, while condemning others for their disinclination to compromise; to the degree that we continue to seek candidates who meet the niche requirements of our personal agendas; to the degree that expect those who run and/or are elected to be super-humans, who can do everything and have no flaws or history (in other words, the non-existent); to the degree we refuse to set priorities in our personal lives, our voting lives and our economic lives for those ideals which we espouse; to the degree that we seek the perfect person to govern us, but refuse to be governed; to the degree we refuse to allow the implementation of decisions until all its parameters are according to our personal liking, so that governance grinds to a halt; to the degree we refuse to engage the complex decisions demanded by the times, while expecting someone else to do it for us; (and no single one of us is innocent of most of those failings or challenges, let alone all of them)—to the degree that we do all that, we contribute to the chaotic national life we deplore.

2) As a people of faith, we are a post-Christ people, called to do Christ's ministry of healing, reconciliation and building up of the community for the sake of the whole world. We are called to seek the wisdom of God and the inspiration of the Spirit in compromise. We are called to look around us in this place and remember that even though we agree on very little, we have built community. We are bound to one another by faith and service, mutual regard and respect. We have the power to take the things we have learned here into the world—building such relationships wherever we find ourselves. We have the power and the vision and the skills to create safe places for disagreement, in reconciling people, one to another, in accepting that people are human and to take the lead in building the community and nation in which we live.

It may seem early to speak of such things, given that the election is more than a year away—an election which as has been noted already has a slate of sixteen candidates. Let us be driven by the awareness that finding a way, that finding common ground, seeking the positive in our life together, seeking positive alliances built on agreement; defining ourselves by who we are and what we believe (not who we are not and what we don't believe); and doing the work of reconciliation is no easy overnight task. Instead of spending the next sixteen months making fun of those who strive and fail, or signing off on the whole process with cynical disregard, let us instead use the time for personal and communal reflection and preparation. A year and some months may be just enough time for us to get our heads around the work before us and our responsibility for it, regardless of who is elected.

Finally, St. Paul's charge and blessing for the church at Corinth is for us as well. "Put things in order, respond to my encouragement, be in harmony with each other, and live in peace - and the God of love and peace will be with you. Say hello to each other with a holy kiss. All of God's people say hello to you. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all."

## **Invitation to the Table**

The prophet said, "They shall come from north and south and east and west to eat in the kingdom of God." By God's power and Spirit and our commitment, may it also be that we shall come from left and right, as progressives and traditionalists, young and old and of every color and orientation, eat together at other tables with peace and respect in the land where we have been placed. Let us come to this table that we might be fed with strength, hope and inspiration for the journey and the task. Let everyone come to the Table, this day.

## **The Lord's Prayer**

**Our Father, who art in heaven,  
hallowed be thy name.  
Thy kingdom come,  
thy will be done  
on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day,  
our daily bread.  
Forgive us our debts  
as we forgive our debtors  
and lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil,  
for thine is the kingdom  
and the power  
and the glory forever. Amen.**