

**“Faith in Days of Contention”  
Sermon by Rev. Tom Warren  
Peace United Church of Christ  
November 2, 2014**

The day after tomorrow we will, as a nation, go to our polling places and cast a vote. If you have been reading the newspapers this week, you undoubtedly heard and picked up from the articles that we are, and remain, a very divided nation. The money is pouring into North Carolina from outside groups to try and sway our decisions. What do we do about division?

The church is to be a model for unity, and in those readings from Paul today, there was this call that we need to remember that part of our mission as Christians is to be about creating communities of faith that live in unity and that we all bring our own gifts, our own special talents, and we are all bringing them together and we are making something strong. Just as Rosina demonstrated with the children, when we bring our voices together, it is a strong voice.

Now, I know in this congregation, like in every other congregation, there are some people who are red and some people who are blue, and I don't care who is what, but I do care about our sense of what is important in life. I think that one of the dangers of our cultural disunity is that in the arguments over what to do and what policies we should support, in our arguments of division of party and policy and all that which goes on, the threat to Christians is that we will lose our focus on God's kingdom—that we will lose our focus on what is our higher call.

It is important for all Americans in a democracy to vote and to vote our conscience, and I trust most of you will do that, but it is more important that we, as Christians, to give our lives over to the larger view of God's kingdom.

Paul, of course, is sort of cold comfort in that many of his letters to the early church went to churches that were divided. Even in those first 100 years of the Christian church there were arguments. There were arguments over policy. There were arguments over leadership. There were arguments over practices. There were arguments over who was welcome and who was not so, in that sense, not much has changed in the church. We continue to have those passionate conversations about such issues, but I think that the future, and the hope for the future, can really be seen in a different place—not so much in the voting booth but out in the streets.

Just a couple of Sundays ago we had the CROP Walk. It was news to me, and perhaps news to some of you, that Greensboro has one of the largest CROP Walks in the nation. In fact, I think it is the second largest CROP Walk in the nation. We raised, in this one CROP Walk, well over \$200,000 to feed hungry people. That is the essence of the church of Jesus Christ. When we come together, regardless of our denomination, regardless of our politics, regardless of our race, regardless of any social category that we can come up with that could divide us, we come together and we walk, we raise money, and we reach out to feed God's family. It is a beautiful thing when God's children come together to feed God's other children who are hungry.

The more I read the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the more I am convinced and convicted that Jesus was not that much concerned with worldly politics as he was concerned with God's kingdom taking shape in the midst of this planet earth. His way of modeling that to the world is always tied to food (feeding the 5,000). If you remember the story of feeding the 5,000, the disciples go to Jesus and they say “All these people are here. They are hungry. Should we send them away?” Jesus says “No way. You feed them. You feed these people. This is what it is about. Feed these people”. “But we only have five loaves and two fishes. We don't have

enough to feed them". Jesus said "Yes we do. We have enough to feed all of God's children." The point of that story was that there were 12 baskets left over. All the tribes of Israel would even have enough food when it was done.

The church of Jesus Christ sometimes loses that focus, and we get caught up in these culture wars around all of all these different issues. All are important issues, but none are the most important issue. What is most important is that we try our best to embody the Gospel of Christ which is the gospel of love and that we try to bring a unity to feed, reach out, and heal people who are hurting.

So, on Tuesday, when we all go to the polls, and we all vote our conscience as we see it, remember that, while that is important, it is not the most important thing we do. What is most important is that we continue to strive to embody Christ's love, a love that was truly unconditional to us and to all people and that we can continue to be the body of Christ that reaches out, the body of Christ that brings people together, the body of Christ that gives us all hope and vision for the future. Thanks be to God for this church. Thanks be to God for all churches in our neighborhoods and around the world who reach out in Christ's love. May we be strengthened this day to be about the gospel of love. Thanks be to God.