



This sermon was originally preached by Rev. Adam Hamilton, senior pastor at Resurrection, a United Methodist Church, on October 20, 2022 as part of a series called "What God Requires." This series was part of the church's 2022 Kindness Campaign with the theme "BE: Just, Kind, Humble," based on the Micah 6:8 scripture. You can view this and other sermons in the series [here](#).

Malice Towards None, Charity for All

Scripture: Ephesians 4:1-3, 31-32, James 1:19 and Matthew 7:1-5

Therefore, as a prisoner for the Lord, I encourage you to live as people worthy of the call you received from God. Conduct yourselves with all humility, gentleness, and patience. Accept each other with love, and make an effort to preserve the unity of the Spirit with the peace that ties you together...Put aside all bitterness, losing your temper, anger, shouting, and slander, along with every other evil. Be kind, compassionate, and forgiving to each other, in the same way God forgave you in Christ.

Be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to grow angry.

I've been thinking recently about President Abraham Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address. It was a Saturday, March 4, 1865. The Civil War would continue for another five weeks before Confederate general Robert E. Lee surrendered at Appomattox, and another six weeks before all the Confederate armies would surrender. But on that March Saturday in 1865, as Lincoln gave that speech, the war's end seemed imminent. 2% of the country's population had died - 620,000 (the equivalent of 6 million today). Terrible destruction wrought on the nation, one side against the other.

Lincoln gave his second inaugural address in front of the U.S. Capitol building. It was only seven minutes long. He was trying to heal a nation torn apart. In the speech, Lincoln made multiple allusions to Scripture. He noted of the North and the South, "Both read the same Bible, and pray to the same God, and each invokes His aid against the other... but let us 'judge not, that we be not judged.'" Lincoln did not dismiss the sin of slavery for the sake of unity. He was quite explicit in naming it as unjust, worthy of judgment and an offense against God and the enslaved. But he did so while recognizing the sin of both the North and the South. He was conciliatory towards those the Union had been at war with for four long, terrible years. We come to the last paragraph of this speech:

With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation's wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow and orphans; to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and a lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations.

It was a remarkable statement. In the bloodiest and most tragic conflict in the history of our nation, with untold suffering, Lincoln called the Union (the people of the north) to eliminate ill will towards the South and to show charity instead. Charity, from the Latin CARITAS, is altruistic love, the Latin equivalent of the Greek agape. Lincoln called the people to the work of binding up the nation's wounds, to care for those who had suffered, and named, as James did in his New Testament letter,

to care for the widows and orphans. This was the type of work that would bring about what Lincoln called a “just and lasting peace.”

An August 2022 survey by YouGov and The Economist found that 67% of Americans believe we’re more divided today than we were at the beginning of 2021. Note, I’m not talking about our government being divided, but about us as Americans being divided. Our politicians are mirroring our own divisions. And it wasn’t enough that we’ve been divided over race, and elections, and human sexuality. Abortion has roared back to the forefront of our national divide after the Supreme Court overturned Roe v. Wade, leading to additional conflicts in many states and cities.

I don’t believe another armed Civil War is likely, but something very much like it could happen if we don’t learn to exchange our malice for charity.

II. The Human Condition: A Struggle with Conflict

The human struggle with conflict is as old as the oldest stories of the Bible. Genesis 4 begins with two brothers, Cain and Abel, one a farmer, the other a shepherd. The story pointed to the perennial conflict in the ancient world between farmers and shepherds. In Genesis 4, Cain appears resentful of his brother Abel. Abel seems to have been blessed by God in noticeable ways in response to his faithfulness. Cain felt slighted, and as his resentment grew, he began to hate his brother and determined that he would kill him. Here’s the image from our stained glass window: GRAPHIC: WINDOW – CAIN KILLING ABEL. Why did we include that tragic story in the window so prominently? Because it teaches us about our impulses, our tendency to resent and to divide and at times even to kill. We all have a bit of Cain in us.

We make assumptions, we become resentful, we can grow to hate our brothers and sisters. There are people I simply don’t like. I think of politics, and there are politicians in Congress, and people running for office, that though I have never met them, never had a conversation with, I find myself having a negative reaction based upon their political rhetoric or their positions on issues. I find it easy to make assumptions about them. When I hear negative things about them from a political ad, or from a party or a news source, I tend to believe it, because it confirms my own biases about that person.

That is the Cain syndrome at work in me. Sadly, the Cain syndrome infects our relationships with each other too: our neighbors, co-workers and even family. Our assumptions about others, and our genuine disagreement with one another, make it hard to practice “charity for all.” Instead, we have a propensity for anger, resentment, even violence and war. In the Bible, there are 200 references to war, another 500 references to killing, another 40 references to murder, another 100 to violence, and over 100 to hate—over 940 references to these all together.

This is why Micah wrote: “What does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 6:8) And Jesus taught, “You should treat people in the same way that you want people to treat you,” or in older English, “Do Unto Others” (Matthew 7:12).

The early Christians struggled with conflict. Every one of the New Testament’s 27 books addresses conflict. It is why Jesus told his disciples to:

- Love your neighbor
- Love your enemy
- Do unto others as you would have them do unto you

And why he emphasized again and again the importance of forgiving one another. It is why he said things like, "Don't judge or you will be judged. Take the log out of your own eye before you take the splinter out of your neighbor's eye" (Matthew 7:1, 3) We see this conflict in the arguments the disciples had with one another over who was the greatest, and Jesus pleading with God on the night before his death, "Father, make them one as we are one" (John 17:11)

We see the conflict in Acts between Paul and his friend Barnabbas, where Luke records, "The disagreement became so sharp that they parted company" (Acts 15:39) And in the debates Paul had with his fellow Jewish Christians about how to interpret scripture.

Paul devoted four chapters of Romans to disagreements in the church (12-15). 1 Corinthians started off with Paul writing, I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose. It is what led Paul to write in 1 Corinthians 13,

If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing. Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends. 1 Corinthians 13:1-8a

Galatians began with Paul's conflict with Peter and James. Ephesians was written largely about the divisions in the early church and the importance of unity, where Paul wrote:

Conduct yourselves with all humility, gentleness, and patience. Accept each other with love, and make an effort to preserve the unity of the Spirit with the peace that ties you together...Put aside all bitterness, losing your temper, anger, shouting, and slander, along with every other evil. Be kind, compassionate, and forgiving to each other, in the same way God forgave you in Christ.

It is why James called people to "Be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to anger." And why 1 John tells us:

Those who say, "I love God," and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.

III. Overcoming the Divisiveness of Politics

Let's apply all of this to how we engage in divisive issues. Mike McCurry was the White House press secretary under President Clinton. He'd spent a lifetime in politics. But when he retired, he wanted to take a deeper dive into his faith, and felt called to go to seminary. He brought his life experience in politics and his theology together by becoming a professor of Public Theology at Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington DC. I asked Mike what he teaches pastors about how to help their congregations to engage in divisive issues. One key idea that Mike mentioned was the importance of

listening, really listening to one another.

It's hard to listen to people we disagree with. It's easier to assume the worst about them. But the commitment to love includes listening. There are people who are truly bad people, but most people I disagree with I find want to do the right thing—we just disagree at times on what that is. And an interesting thing happens when we seek to make right judgments that are fair – one of the key meanings of justice – and when we lead with kindness, and when we listen with humility – we often find we were a bit wrong about the other person. We sometimes even find new friends.

I have invited you to consider being a part of a conversation with someone who held views different from your own. We partnered with United Community Service of Johnson County who suggested the idea, and with National Public Radio using a format they've used for these conversations. We filmed several of these. I believe most if not all were between Resurrection members who were of opposite political parties and held very different ideas about a number of hot button issues. I wanted you to see a small excerpt of just one of those conversations, as a picture of what can happen when complete strangers who hold very different views, take the time to listen to one another. This is just two minutes of that conversation – the opening and the closing – it is one small step. Take a listen,

[**VIDEO: ONE SMALL STEP VIDEO**](#)

The aim wasn't to change each other's minds. It was to help each other listen, to find common ground, to foster understanding and to help them to love their neighbor, to be just, kind and humble.

Postscript: Importance of Voting

We've been campaigning to do unto others, to love your neighbor. Both should guide not only how we engage in politics, but who we vote for. But this does not take the place of voting. I want to encourage each of you to vote regardless of your political affiliation.

Often we get to the voting booth and don't know who to vote for. We have an idea of the major races, but not on the lesser known races. Each election, I try to find objective information on the candidates for myself, read up on candidates on both sides, find those who most closely share my values, and vote for them regardless of party affiliation. Try vote411.com where you can plug in your address and get information from the candidates themselves in your area, and use the information to guide your choices.

When LaVon and I got back from vacation during campaign season, I began sifting through a huge stack of mail that included 18 campaign postcards. The negative postcards outnumbered the positive two to one. Republicans and Democrats were equal opportunity offenders.

I wondered as I read their claims about each other: if I asked the candidate being maligned would they say that this was an accurate characterization of their position? I personally knew two of the candidates who were being maligned, and I knew the postcard did not accurately represent their positions, but was a caricature.

I thought about one of our founding members, Wendell Lady, who died a few years ago. Wendell was an engineer, but devoted himself to public service. He could have moved into upper management, and made many times what he made if he'd not decided to serve in politics. He served on and

chaired the Overland Park City Council for years, then ran to serve in the Kansas legislature, eventually became speaker of the Kansas house. He was the Republican candidate for governor in 1982 but was defeated. He was one of the most respected men in the State of Kansas and went on to serve on a host of boards including chairing our first visionary committee, our first three building committees, and a host of others.

What I loved about Wendell is that he put people ahead of parties. He believed character mattered. He listened more than he spoke. He was one of the most just, kind and humble human beings I've ever known. And his political service was just that—service. Wendell was not alone. There are a dozen other politicians or former politicians I know in our congregation, likely more. And all of those that I personally know share that same servant's heart.

Years ago, his friend and my elementary school principal, Wayne Morris, also a member of Resurrection, wanted to write a short biography of Wendell and all of his accomplishments. Wayne wasn't able to complete it, but urged Wendell to finish this project. I loved the final lines: "Wendell requests his legacy to be only that he was a decent and caring human being who did his level best to make a difference in the lives of others." May that be the legacy that we all seek to leave behind.

I want to end where we began, with Lincoln's quote. May we live with malice towards no one and charity to all, seeking to do the right thing. That's what it looks like to love your neighbor, to do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with God, to do unto others. That's the spirit that can bring the healing our nation, and our own hearts, need.