

July 27th Reflection by Rev. Everett Bassett – Oneonta District Superintendent

Did they hear the same speech?



That question has come to mind more than once as I look in on the political conventions that are going on the last couple weeks. The pattern is familiar and predictable: someone will give an impassioned speech; the crowd will cheer; then a panel of commentators from across the political spectrum will tell us what we heard. They will speak each from her/his perspective, and by the time it's done, you will wonder if, indeed, they were listening to the same speech.

Do they read the same Bible?

Perhaps you've wondered that as well, when you have heard Christian people profoundly disagree about issues of faith (for example, at a United Methodist Conference). Each party is passionate; each party makes a biblical case; both arrive at conclusions that are poles apart. Do they read the same Bible?

In such a divided world, where lines are drawn on so many issues, I am struck by a couple verses in this week's epistle lesson from the Letter to the Colossians -- 3: 9-11. It seems to me there is a sequence there that speaks to our divisions:

- 1) *We are honest with each other.* 'Do not lie to one another.' In terms of disagreeing with one another, we respect each other enough to speak plainly, and to listen carefully, in a mutual effort to find the truth – even if the best we can do is to agree to disagree.
- 2) *We are open to new possibilities.* In vss. 9-10, this is described as shedding the old self, and being 'clothed' with a new self. How much of our failure of unity is because we cannot untangle ourselves from old ideas and comfort zones?
- 3) *We are renewed and re-shaped.* In the presence of honesty, respect, and openness, we can be 'renewed in knowledge' and re-shaped in the 'image of (our) creator.'
- 4) *Walls come down.* It would appear that the world known by the writer Colossians was just as divided as ours. The path of honesty, openness, and renewal leads to the end of divisions. 'In that renewal, there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free...(and then, this amazing declaration:),,,but Christ is all and in all!!' (The first exclamation point is the scripture-writer's; the second is mine.)

Is it possible that there is a reality that transcends the things that divide us into separate camps? A road marked with honesty, respect, openness, and renewal? I pray so every day.

Meanwhile, I sit in a meeting where two people hotly disagree about one of the hot-button issues that divides the church right now. Right at the moment when it looks like sparks will fly, one of them takes a deep breath and says, 'But you know, we are friends, and we both follow Jesus.' And the whole moment changes. The disagreement is still real; but Christ is all and in all.

And in the end, that must transform something. Maybe everything.

Shalom, Everett