

GRASPING FOR MUCH-NEEDED GRACE:
20 Days of Nonpartisan Prayer in a Polarized Political Season
Vermont Conference (UCC) prayer initiative
Fall 2020

Day 10 (Saturday, October 24)

Make Love, Not Truth

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Scripture focus: *“be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord”*
(*Philippians 2:2 NRSV*)

Reflection: There’s no getting around it. As our country nears what is already a deeply contentious national election, we have great cause for concern. Bitter and frequently violent disagreements are now an everyday reality, and civil unrest seems sure to follow whatever outcome results from November 3. These tensions ensnare even our churches as congregants find themselves positioned on opposing sides of the present political and cultural divide.

Of course, there’s nothing at all wrong with having different perspectives; indeed, our own denomination thrives on such diversity! The problem arises when we lose the ability to disagree in good faith. In our own time, impugning the motives of those with whom we disagree is a common and alluring temptation. Have you ever found yourself thinking something like this?: “There’s no way that person honestly believes what they are saying. They’re just ignorant or naive or heartless!”

When confronted with forcefully opposing views, it can be hard to resist such cynicism. This impulse can have the effect of hardening our faith into truth-claims, ideas by which we measure the sincerity or validity of other folks’ convictions. You could call this a litmus test for discerning who is and is not a *true* Christian How

might we overcome such antipathy? I think Paul's letter to the young church he planted in Philippi can help us.

That budding congregation was made up largely of converts from a broad range of philosophies, which were part of fully formed, embodied traditions (not just "schools of thought"). Given this, it is not difficult to imagine what may have prompted Paul's concern for unity in the church. He recognized that the root of the problem was the absence of trust between various members of the church. Adherence to certain truth-claims or spiritual understandings thus came to rival genuine care and concern as the definitive marker of one's faith. The task before Paul, then, was to help members of the church probe the mystery of Christ's love, which could inspire them to deepen their connection and resilience as a community.

To many, what Paul instructs here is quite radical—he goes so far as to suggest that the faithful should treat each other better than they would themselves! This may seem to us hopelessly aspirational and even unhealthy. And perhaps it is. Or perhaps Paul has a very clear sense of how to cut through the mutually assured distrust-ction of tensive claims to ultimate truth. For Paul, the way forward through bitter discord is to re/member our place in the relational web to which we belong. In the end, this is what it means to "be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord." And no idea, whatever truth it may contain, can compete with this.

Prayer: Creative Love of the Universe, give us the strength to endure in the face of these helplessly polarizing times, the vision to recognize the fullness of our community, and the conviction to draw on the courage of our connections. Amen.

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