

Centre Congregational Church, United Church of Christ

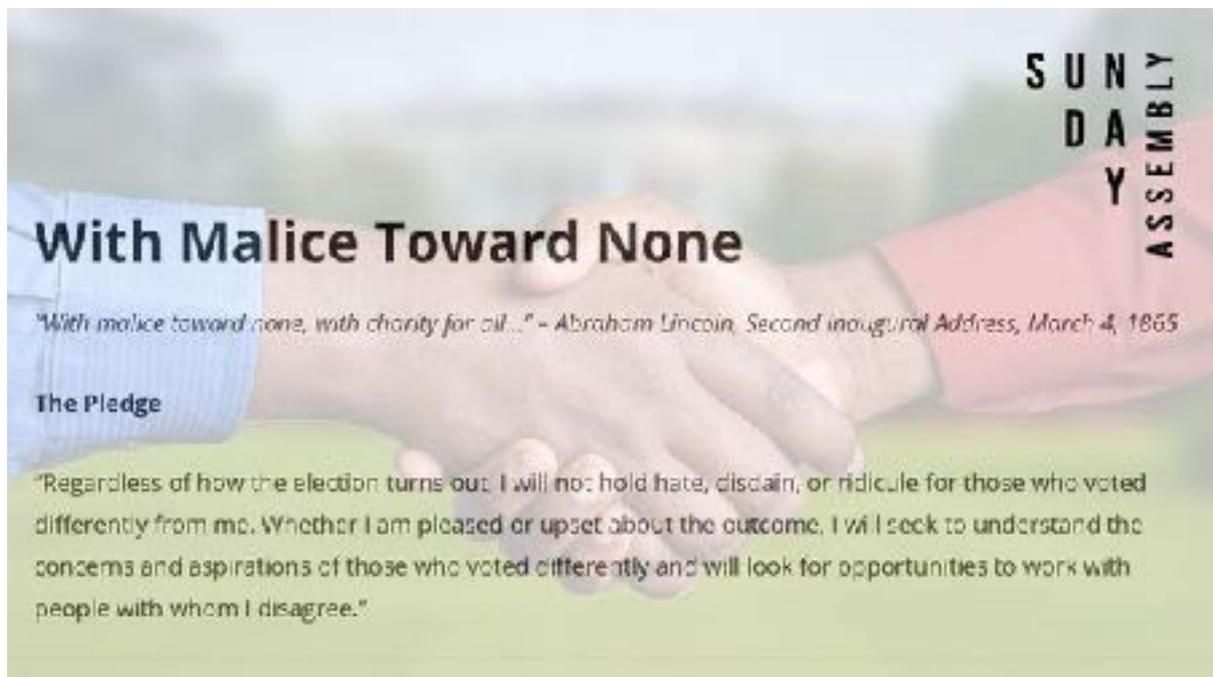
The Rev. Dr. Scott Couper

Sunday, November 1, 2020

Fifth in a Five Sermon Series: "With Malice toward None"

"Seek to Understand"

Christian Scripture: I Corinthians 13:8-12



When envisioning my vocation as a young man, I never really intended on becoming a local church pastor. Truth be told, I think God may have equipped me better to be a university lecturer or an attorney. It was almost the result of a coin toss that I attended the University of Chicago's Divinity School to study for the ministry rather than the University of Michigan to study for the bar.

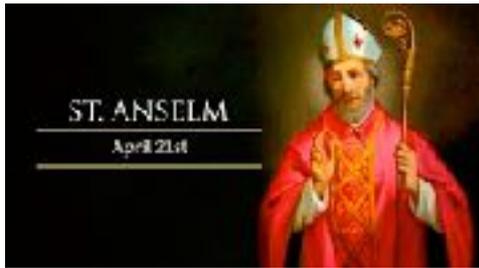


I remember very clearly my first year, my first semester, taking Systematic Theology. I was given a text book entitled *Faith Seeking Understanding* to read and study.¹



The book walks a novice student through all the major subjects of theology, from theodicy to soteriology. I have carried this book for thirty years across seas to different continents. It is falling apart (I have to be careful when opening it). I treasure it.

¹ Daniel Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991).



In the first pages of the book, Daniel Migliore, a Presbyterian (I think) from Princeton, New Jersey, states that the ancient Christian father Anselm defined theology, the study of God, as *fides quaerens intellectum* or “faith seeking understanding”.² Thirty years ago when I read that “faith is venturing to inquire, daring to raise questions”, I knew I chose the right course of study.³ I also read, “Faith has nothing in common with indifference to the search for truth, or fear of it, or the arrogant claim to possess it fully. True faith must be distinguished from fideism. Fideism says we reach a point where we must stop our inquiry and simply believe; faith keeps on seeking and asking”.⁴

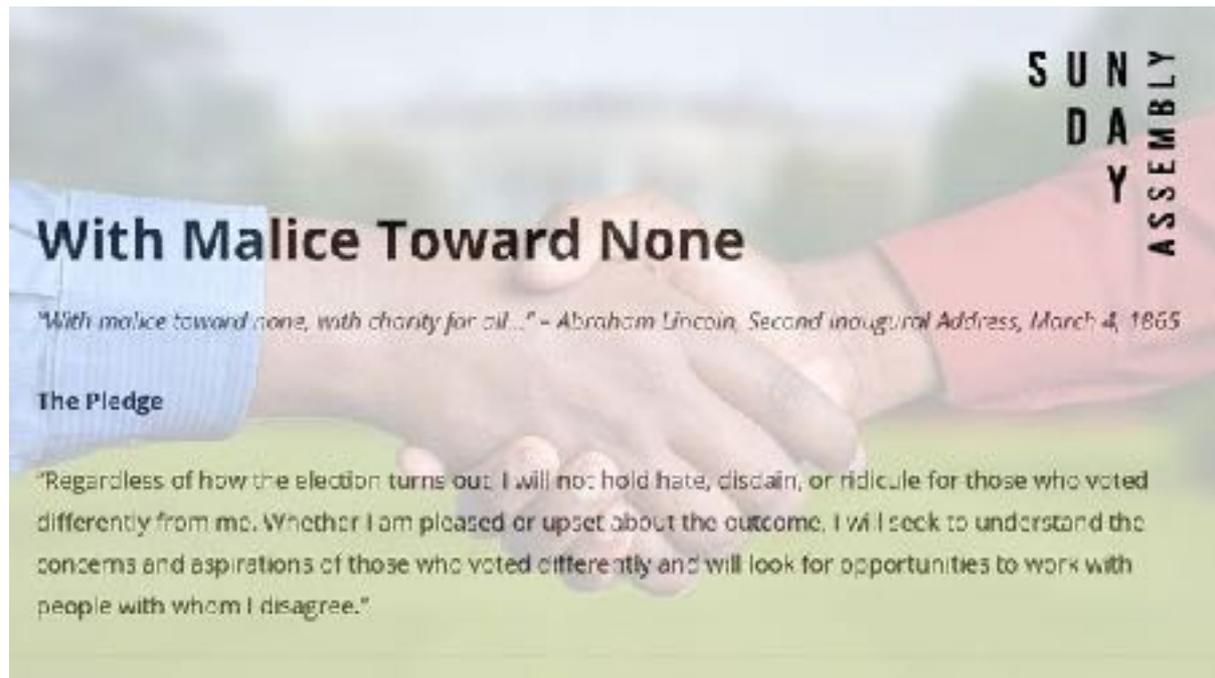


In just a few days, I will sit alone in front of my television sick with worry watching the election returns. I will not pray for a winner. Rather, I will pray for

² Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding*, 2.

³ *ibid.*

⁴ *ibid.*



peace. I will be separated by a continent from family with whom I politically agree and by a state from a loved one with whom I politically disagree. At 3:00am on Tuesday morning, I will not have family, a spouse, nor students, nor friends, nor even parishioners on whom to depend. At that hour, I will only have my faith. I will only have my faith.

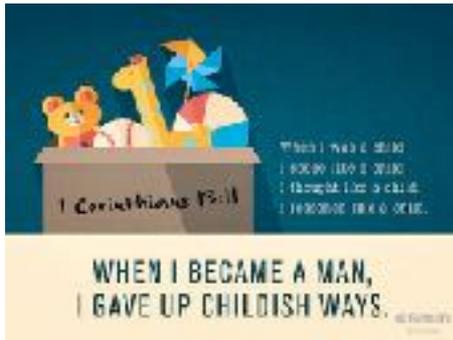
For four weeks we have journeyed to this pledge: *Regardless of how the election turns out, I will not hold hate, distain, or ridicule for those who voted differently from me. Whether I am pleased or upset about the outcome, I will **seek to understand** the concerns and aspirations of those who voted differently and I will look for opportunities to work with people with whom I disagree.*



The key in this pledge for me is to “seek to understand”. Such a quest requires humility and it achieves relationship. And for me, relationship is everything – with one another and with God – relationship is everything.

Today, it all comes together: Matt Deen’s call for us two weeks ago to “Make Love, Not Truth”, our promise to one another and to God to “seek understanding”, and Paul’s words to the Corinthians that though we do not understand everything, “Love never fails”.

No matter how many newspaper articles we read, we will not understand. No matter how many pundits we listen to, we will not understand. No matter how many priests and ministers we hear give sermons, we will not understand. No matter how many scriptures we read, we will not understand.

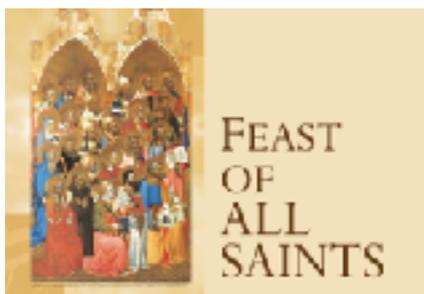


Paul states, “When I was a child, I talked like a child, I reasoned like a child. [...]

Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face.

Now I know in part; then I shall know full, even as I am fully known”

(1 Corinthians 13:11-13).



Paul is saying to us that it will only be in full communion, complete *reunion*, with God that we shall fully understand. Today, we honor and remember those on All Saints’ Day those who have departed this life and now see God “face to face” (13:12), those who no longer see dimly as we still do. Today as we celebrate Holy Communion in our homes, we taste a glimpse, if even just for a moment, of the perfect relationships with one another and with God. Today as we approach Election Day, may we not place our trust in prophesying pollsters, knowledgeable presidential candidates, nor pontificating

pundits. Let us instead place our faith, our love, in God and those who are before us around The Table.



With great humility, let us in faith seek understanding about and with those whom God had placed in our midst whether we agree or disagree, for “Love never fails” (13:8).

This is the word of God, and it was delivered to the people of God, and the people of God responded, “Amen”.