

A Sermon by the Rev. Jeffrey A. Packard	Prepared for the congregation of Christ Episcopal Church, Spotsylvania, VA
To be delivered on November 13, 2016	On the occasion of the Twenty-sixth Sunday after Pentecost, Proper 28C

### Prayer for Our Nation

I'm sure there is one thing we can all agree on this morning. You may, or may not, like the outcome of the election, but I'm sure we are all glad that the presidential campaign is over. I kind of pride myself on the fact that Christ Church is a very diverse parish. We may not be all that diverse racially or ethnically, but we are all over the map politically and theologically. So, you may be sitting here this morning delighted by the outcome of Tuesday's election, but you may also be sitting next to someone who is terrified by it. I'm sure that both of those perspectives are realities represented by people here this morning.

But no matter which way the election had gone, there would have been a roughly equal number of people in our country disappointed, angered, even disgusted. For me that is the take-away lesson after this past week, after this grueling nearly two years of campaigning, that we are, as so many have noted, a nation divided. Those divisions feel like they go deeper than just political party, or candidate preference, or which cable news network you watch. It feels like we are fractured, separated by divergent world views, differing sets of priorities, hopes, and fears. These divisions are contorted to grotesque proportions by the strident voices of social media, and the insistency of the 24 hour news cycle. If you allow yourself to be exposed to this for too long, you are bound to come away feeling like the world is coming to an end.

Well, I have good news for you this morning: The world is coming to an end. Maybe not today. Maybe not on January 20<sup>th</sup>. But this world will definitely, one day, come to an end. And when it does, God will still be in charge, as he is now, and was even before this world was

called into existence. Before the world does come to an end it is our job to get right with God and with each other, through Christ.

I don't have the answer to our divisions as a country. I don't know what the next four years will bring. All I know is that we have been given a message that is good news for everyone. We are called to be the salt and the leaven; the little bit that makes all the difference. If our nation is divided, we listen to one another. We hear one another. We see one another. We do not talk past one another, or snipe at straw men. We do the hard work of building community, confronting injustice and prejudice when we see it, and giving each other the benefit of the doubt as we are all sinners.

I don't mean to make light of the very serious divisions that we face, nor do I mean to make it sound like we all just need to hold hands and sing "We Shall Overcome". The Scriptures are filled with descriptions of dark moments in human history, and prophetic writings about times of conflict and anxiety. In all of these terrifying times, the message is clear and consistent: do not fear. It is not meant as a vapid aphorism or a denial of the reality of suffering. It is an assertion that God is sovereign and faithful. Do not fear!

With the courage of our faith in God's goodness, we face these times of division together. I pray that we in the Body of Christ can be a light in the darkness, an example of how people can have profound differences and yet gather around the same table to be fed by the same Lord. I pray that we can speak and act in opposition to injustice and hatred, speaking the truth in love. Finally, my prayer—as I'm sure is true for all of you—my prayer is for our country, that we may prove ourselves a people worthy of God's grace, and that we may find a way to live up to the ideals that define us so we can indeed be, "one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty, and justice for all."

Amen.