

The Purple Church

Acts 2: 42-47

The approaching political conventions remind me of the story of the fellow who said to his mother one day, **"Mother, I don't believe you'd vote for God Himself if He ran on the Democratic ticket!"**

To which she replied: **"Of course not; if He switched parties at this late date, he wouldn't be reliable!"**

If you've ever had the need to go into Toys-R-Us, you've seen it: The PINK aisle. It's that Day-Glo, cotton-candy, Pepto-Bismol color that sets the Barbie aisle apart from everything else in the store (everything else on earth, actually!).

Even if you never walk down that aisle you really can't avoid it - its oozing pinkish aura pollutes the light at either end of the aisle, and the ceiling above it fluoresces with a pink haze that can be seen all the way down to where the bicycles and video games hang out.

For all those little girls who love Barbie, the pink aisle is heaven. For everyone else, the pink aisle is the pits.

That color pink divides shoppers in a way no fence ever could.

Increasingly, color seems to be dividing the rest of our lives, the very fabric of our communities. But not the colors you may first think of.

Not black and white.

Not brown and yellow.

The great color divide is now red and blue.

According to the political pros, the country is now divided into "blue" states and "red" states. The blues are given labels like "liberal", "urban", Democrat." The reds are given labels like "conservative", "rural", "Republican".

Look at a map of USAmerica and you'll see blue states running up and down the coastlines. Across the broad center lies a red carpet, a solid sea of red states. Though red states dwarf the

number of blue states, the higher population densities along the East and West coasts mean the actual numbers of people counted in each color come out pretty even.

This red/blue distinction is a color divide that runs through every community. During the Civil War, blue was clearly located in the north; gray was clearly located in the south. Today's color division runs through every state and city, no matter what the majority rules or the Electoral College counts determine. The colors red and blue illustrate much more than just political preference. Increasingly they are the pigmentation highlighting deep cultural differences. Red and blue difference of opinion can cause a rift in communities, neighborhoods, schools, and even some churches. Both blues and reds like to claim the moral high ground. Each color points to the other color as the source of all social ills.

Especially during years of presidential elections, this culture war gets more intense, more disruptive, and even ugly.

I. This is not the kind of community envisioned, then created, by the first Christians.

In today's text from Acts, Luke describes the relationships and the attitudes that bound together those very first followers of **The Way**. If Luke's details are somewhat idealized it's because he's focused more on the life changing gift of the Holy Spirit, and less on the weaknesses of the all too fleshly human beings. Luke is prophesying the church's way forward into the future. He knows the power of the Holy Spirit to make possible the communion of minds, hearts, and spirits that the very first community of Christians miraculously experienced and demonstrated to the rest of the world.

In Luke's vision, the church was a community that experienced and exhibited a unique set of relationships. They had an attitude that enabled them to think and act together, to hold things in common, to spend time together in worship and prayer, and to do all the above ***"with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people"*** (verses 46-47).

We need this vision of what the Christian life ought to be like to keep us going in the here and now. For too many of us who invest our hearts and souls, time and treasure into our church communities, the results we see today are hardly this harmonious. Just as the very name Jerusalem,

in Hebrew, means peace and unity, while its history has failed to live up to its name, so it is with the Christian church. In fact, to survive within a typical American community takes a certain toughness and resilience. It requires learning how to give-and-take. It's a relationship that can often leave bruises.

Deep, purple bruises. Yet this purple is nothing less than a divine gift.

II. Purple is indeed the sign of true Christian community at work.

" The color purple is the sign of sacrifice. "

" The color purple is the sign of compassion. "

" The color purple is the sign of love for each other. " Not red. Not blue. The combination of those two primary colors brings a new, deeper, richer color to the world's landscape. The Color Purple.

- Without a doubt the one who paid the most to wear purple was Jesus Christ. In John 19:2 the gospel writer describes how the abusive, insulting soldiers brutalizing Jesus ***"wove a crown of thorns and put it on his head, and they dressed him in a purple robe."*** Mocking and taunting Jesus, striking him in the face while calling ***"Hail, King of the Jews"***, the soldiers purpled Jesus' face to match his "royal" robe.

- The cost of the color purple was crucifixion. But Jesus' ultimate kingship was crowned by his resurrection. Those who confess Jesus today are called to embody Christ's royal purple in every community.

- Christians aren't blue-blooded. Christians aren't red-blooded. The community of Christ is created by the workings of the Holy Spirit. That Spirit enables different persons, different perspectives, to find a way to live, work, pray, eat, suffer, sweat, and celebrate together. The color of the first Christian community was purple.

In a true community of faith, red and blue don't just intermingle; creating some muddy mix that means nothing. In the Christ centered community, red and blue bind together combining their intensities, their commitments, their essence, and taking on Christ's royal hue of purple togetherness.

St. Thomas Aquinas said that **"When you meet a contradiction, make a distinction"**. Maybe it's time not so much to make a distinction as to make a bridge. We can't make a bridge by starting in the middle. We have to bring the extremes together.

That's why it won't be easy doing purple. Just like in the English language, there are lots of rhymes in English for red and blue (roses are red; violets are blue...), there are no rhymes in the English language for the word purple.

There's lots of support for red and blue. But not for purple.

III. Purple will cost you.

When Jesus got the purple robe, he also got the crown of thorns. It won't be easy to live the Christian life in this culture of extremes.

Yoga means "yoke". And yoke means union of opposites. Maybe Christians need to learn to practice some Yoga. At least Jesus thought so: **"Take my yoke upon you"**, Jesus said.

In the midst of the Color Wars, we find ourselves today at "loose ends". The church's mission is to help loose ends become tight ends by bringing the ends together. Can we learn to think twice? If the early church is any kind of model for us – Christians don't clash; they coalesce.

For some, God is an intimate, immanent God who is present all around us and within us.

For others God is a distant, transcendent God who dwells in reaches far beyond our knowing or understanding.

For Jesus God was both: He taught us to pray,

"Our Father (you can't get more intimate than that) **who art in Heaven . . . "** (God's transcendence and otherness is honored and insisted on).

In the very first words of "The Lord's Prayer", Jesus begins by yanking us from one end of the yoke to another.

Are we ready to correlate the divide? Are we ready to bring red and blue together? Are we ready to be a place, NOT that is color-blind, but to be a place that is color-full? Will you wear the color purple with Christ? Are you ready to bear the cost of that color purple?

These were the final public words of Pope John Paul II, prepared in advance to be read to the faithful if he wasn't able to attend the Feast of Divine Mercy, which began at 8pm the night of his death.

"To humanity, which at times seems to be lost and dominated by the power of evil, egoism and fear, the risen Lord offers as a gift his love that forgives, reconciles and reopens the spirit to hope. It's love that converts hearts and gives peace. How much need the world has to understand and accept Divine Mercy!"

The color of the love that forgives, reconciles and reopens the spirit to hope is the color purple.

Pastor Larry Smith

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