

**Sunday, October 18, 2015**  
**Creating a Common Good**  
**Rev. Laura Shennum**

### **Wisdom from Our Sources**

Excerpt from Restoring Political Civility with Richard Mouw from On Being with Krista Tippet

From Richard Mouw:

*“The fact that our kids are going to school together, that we are in the same parking lots, we are in the same supermarket aisles, we’re driving the same freeways; that there’s a common life. And beneath all of that, there’s something that binds human beings together that politics can’t create and it shouldn’t be able to destroy. And we really need to be thinking as people of faith, how is it that our common life can flourish?”*

Excerpt from “The Open Space of Democracy” by Terry Tempest Williams

*The human heart is the first home of democracy. It is where we embrace our questions. Can we be equitable? Can we be generous? Can we listen with our whole beings, not just our minds, and offer our attention rather than our opinions? And do we have enough resolve in our hearts to act courageously, relentlessly, without giving up—ever—trusting our fellow citizens to join with us in our determined pursuit of a living democracy?*

Excerpt from “Healing the Heart of Democracy” by Parker Palmer

*When all our talk about politics is either technical or strategic, to say nothing of partisan and polarizing, we loosen or sever the human connections on which empathy, accountability, and democracy itself depend. If we cannot talk about politics in the language of the heart – if we cannot be publicly heartbroken, for example, that the wealthiest nation on earth is unable to summon the political will to end childhood hunger at home – how can we create a politics worthy of the human spirit, one that has a chance to serve the common good?*

## **Sermon – Rev. Laura**

This morning, we are going to have a discussion. I am going to set up different ideas and then ask a question for you to respond to, which means this is an interactive sermon.

According to Parker Palmer, we are living a political world of the brokenhearted. Our nation is divided and no longer in dialogue. When we look back on the values and vision we once had as a nation, we realize they are no longer what is leading us into the future.

We were founded as a democratic nation, which meant the government was of the people, by the people, and for the people.

Palmer suggests a democracy means “a nonstop experiment in the strength and weakness of our political institutions, our local communities and associations, and the human heart. Its outcome can never be taken for granted. The democratic experiment is endless, unless we blow up the lab, and the explosives to do the job are found within us.

But so also is the heart’s alchemy that can turn suffering into community, conflict into the energy of creativity, and tension into an opening toward the common good. ”

Our first question this morning is if democracy is an on-going experiment, what is the role of “we the people” in today’s government?

Palmer suggests we are suffering from heart disease as a country, meaning we have forgotten to engage in our common life together, to see and appreciate otherness, and to learn from each other.

He identifies two areas of concern. The first is consumerism.

He states: “When spending time online or going to the mall to buy consumer goods become a primary purpose of our lives—leaving us no time or energy to engage our neighbors and build our community— democracy is weakened. By exiting the public sphere to engage in private consumerism we create a vacuum, and into that vacuum rush all kinds of other powers that want to control our democratic society. . . .

One of democracy's great threats these days is a quiet takeover by an oligarchy of wealth that calls the shots in national and state capitals, trumping the will of "We the People." How would one even know the will of the people if we're all down at the mall buying stuff?"

The second concern is the empty self.

He explains: "the self that can't find meaning and purpose, that has in effect "lost heart." This is a self that is totally disoriented by lots of things—the collapse of traditions that gave us meaning and purpose, the cacophony and noise of our culture, the frantic speed and pace. In the conditions of modern life it's really very easy to lose any sense that I have a reason for being here, or that I am somebody whose life has worth."

Second Question: What are other primary concerns about our current political atmosphere?

Richard Mouw, in his interview with Krista Tippett, states: "a lot of people today who have strong convictions are not very civil, and a lot of people who are civil don't have very strong convictions, and what we really need is convicted civility."

Palmer suggests we suffer from a condition called, "citizenship lite." We do the minimal amount to participate in the political world, especially if there is a concern for conflict or if the issue seems overwhelming.

Third question what can we do to move ourselves from being an audience of the political world to a participant?

Take out your order of service and let's read together the seven principles. How do these principles guide us in how we can be active participants in creating a world for the common good?

I find hope in a story my oldest daughter, Siena, shared with me recently. She talked about how she very rarely talks politics with any of her friends, but recently in a conversation someone brought up Donald Trump and she felt she needed to step into the conversation. Instead of leading with her convictions, she first asked her friend, "What do you agree with that Trump has said?" And the friend responded, "I really like his ideas on taxation and how the wealthy should be taxed at a higher rate." Siena agreed she liked that point as well. The conversation continued with the group of friends sharing their different opinions and ideas about each of the candidates.

Where do you find hope?

Palmer concludes his book, "Healing the Heart of Democracy" with the following: "If I were asked for two words to summarize the habits of the heart American citizens need in response to twenty-first-century conditions, chutzpah and humility are the words I would choose. By chutzpah I mean knowing that I have a voice that needs to be heard and the right to speak it. By humility I mean accepting the fact that my truth is always partial and may not be true at all— so I need to listen with openness and respect, especially to "the other," as much as I need to speak my own voice with clarity and conviction. Humility plus chutzpah equals the kind of citizens a democracy needs."

To create a world for the common good, we need to be doers and not merely hearers.