

First and Foremost

Rev. Dr. Richard Gibbons

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

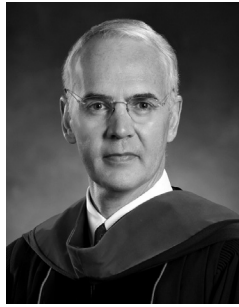


SUNDAY WORSHIP

8:30 & 11:00am Traditional Worship

10:45 Ignite Modern Worship

Live Streaming: FirstPresGreenville.org



“A New Kitchen, Perhaps?”

1 Peter 1:15-16

From time to time, you may find yourself having a seemingly innocuous

conversation with your spouse. It begins in the kitchen with the most innocent of comments, “Wouldn’t it be nice if we could...?” But beware, because before the conversation is over, what started as “Maybe new tiles above the countertops would work well,” concludes with “Why don’t we think about replacing the entire kitchen?”

Such a conversation is often followed by prayerful planning, consulting a contractor, developing a budget, and praying again once you see the budget.

You begin Day 1 with a sense of excitement as trucks pull up and a large construction dumpster appears in your driveway. Then the demolition begins. It is noisy and messy, with dust everywhere. Cabinets are ripped out, holes appear in your walls, you no longer have much of a floor, and countertops and appliances are all gone. It dawns on you that remodeling will take longer and be more complicated than you initially imagined.

In the New Testament Epistle of 1 Peter, one of the major motifs is revealed when Peter writes, *You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house.* The dominant theme of being remodeled and renewed runs throughout this epistle, and Peter encourages his readers to ask, “Who are we becoming as we seek to grow and mature in our faith? Are we willing to do the demanding, messy, work of daily discipleship?”

Peter reminds his readers in the first century—and us in the 21st century—of the critical importance of living out our faith each day. He does this by providing clear instructions on how to be the individuals God is calling us to be: *But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect* (1 Peter 3:15).

When Peter writes about interacting with others in gentleness and respect, he is asking us to live out our faith at a time in history when we are experiencing significant political, cultural, and social divides. We are, as others have mentioned, a nation that lives with contrasting views. But when contrasting views morph into personal conflict, hatred, or animosity, we need to be extremely careful.

We live in a day and age when it is easy to hate, easy to attack, easy to reject, easy to walk away, easy to un-friend, easy to live off the parasitic and pathological sins of hatred, cynicism, and suspicion.

It takes courage to do the hard work of daily discipleship—listening, learning, empathizing, caring, praying, and committing yourself to relationship-building; agreeing where you can, and refraining from obnoxious, demeaning behavior where you can’t.

Peter powerfully reminds us that maturing in our faith involves setting apart Christ as Lord in our hearts, and then intentionally engaging with those we disagree with, doing so with gentleness and respect.

Please understand what I am asking. I am not asking you to give up your strongly held political, social, or cultural beliefs. I am asking you, however, to not turn contrasting views into conflict. I am asking you to intentionally resist giving in to the cold, dark, toxic discontent of animosity, hostility, and personal loathing.

Let me close by reminding you of a deeply moving moment in the book *To Kill A Mockingbird*. You may remember that five-year-old Scout is the main character. The developing story line is about her going to school for the first time and her many adventures with friends and family in their neighborhood.

About halfway through the book, Tom Robinson is on trial for an alleged assault of a sexual nature. One night, the men in the town drive over to the jail to drag Tom out and lynch him. Scout’s father, Atticus Finch, is the lawyer defending Tom.

When the men arrive, Atticus is sitting outside the jail and welcomes them. They ask for Tom and Atticus refuses to hand him over. A tense

conversation develops. Scout and her older brother Jim arrive on the scene to visit their dad. Jim realizes something strange is going on, but Scout, in all of her innocence, recognizes one of the men and pushes her way to the front, “Hey, Mr. Cunningham. Don’t you remember me, Mr. Cunningham? I’m Jean Louise Finch. You brought us some hickory nuts one early morning, remember? We had a talk. I went and got my daddy to come out and thank you. I go to school with your boy. I go to school with Walter; he’s a nice boy. Tell him ‘hey’ for me, won’t you?” The silence of Mr. Cunningham’s response as the ringleader is deafening.

A child has stepped into the middle of a mob—a mob driven by hatred, intent on a hanging, infected and inflamed by the emotion of the moment.

Scout then innocently speaks to her father, “Atticus, I was just saying to Mr. Cunningham...” She realizes something is wrong. The men are staring at each other; no one knows what to do. Scout speaks again, “What’s the matter? I sure meant no harm, Mr. Cunningham.”

Mr. Cunningham finally remembers that he is a man and a father. He is not part of a faceless mob bent on hatred and loathing. The men quietly disperse as they recall who they are.

Doing the hard work of living out your faith may be messy, costly, and much more complicated than remodeling a kitchen. Yet when we refuse to surrender to the dark, toxic, discontent of animosity, hostility, and personal loathing, we *set apart Christ as Lord and are ready to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect* (1 Peter 3:15).

To view messages by Dr. Gibbons,
visit FirstPresGreenville.org (Media menu)
or watch *First and Foremost* each Sunday at
10:30am on Fox Carolina.

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