

I never imagined I'd do a preaching series on paint, but here we are. I'm teasing, I'm not gonna talk about paint this morning. Not a lot, at least. Oh, who am I kidding. Paint it is! I'm excited for this Body to gather like it does every week, and I'm excited for us to have a common cause to work towards. And I'm excited that we're making progress on a project that's been years in the making.

I think I mentioned this to a few of y'all, but this paint thing has been a long time coming. Back in 1984, when the Village of Hamilton officially became a Historic District, St. Thomas' was still white. Now, a quick note: we are not on the Historic Register individually; but we are a part of the Historic District. That may sound nitpicky, and it is, but that nit matters for things like work on the buildings. Incidentally, the things that make this building "historically significant" according to that entry are the "board and batten sheathing, the steeply pitched roof, and the pointed arch windows." Nothing there about paint. So, in 2000, when the church was painted its current color, or at least its current color before it faded, they had the freedom to choose. A Historic Preservation Architect came and chipped away to the original paint, they analyzed what they found, and they brought that rediscovered color back to the Vestry.

Now, here's where it gets tricky. The Church knew that that was the process, so when the building turned up brown, everyone that wasn't in the decision-making room assumed the new color was the original color. As it turns out, that's not quite how it went down. The Vestry saw the original color, which was a very dark green, and they opted for a different color instead. That's where the brown came from. But they didn't tell anyone. Folks, that's why we're doing things this way now. Vestry meetings are open to the public, we publish detailed minutes, and we're sharing the decision-making on this one all for the sake of transparency.

As you might imagine, in a room full of fifty, sixty, or a hundred Episcopalians, given human nature being what it is and the *via media* and a distinct but varied set of tastes, there are rarely fewer than 500 opinions. I've got about 90 of them myself. And that's not really a problem. That's just who we are. It's not really a problem, so long as we remember that image of God that every one of us bears as we go through this process. Perhaps when we cast our votes, rather than some version of "Come on, white" or "Green or bust!" or "It's either brown or I'm skipping town," perhaps it would be better to drop our ballots in the box with a whispered "whatever shall be, shall be."

I was talking with a non-churchy someone in town that had heard about our paint pickin' process, and they had questions. Mostly, they wondered why this was such a big deal. They loved the democratic approach and they really got excited about preferential voting, but why so much work for something so literally on the surface? I told 'em what we talked about last week, the it-matters-but-it-doesn't-but-it-does thing, and said I think it's that. On the one hand, we all have our preferences, but also, it's a relatively low-stakes thing in the grand scheme of the universe and the calling of the church. We don't argue over things like supporting a Ukrainian Family or providing legal counsel for migrant workers. We don't get twisted up on caring for widows or loving folks or making space for difficult hearts. And I think that's because those things matter so deeply, we know there's a clear calling for how the church should be in those places and for those people.

But when it comes to what the building should look like, the only advice we have from scripture comes from the Tabernacle and the First and Second Temples back in the Old Testament. And there's not much to go on in the New Testament for the interior or exterior embellishments of churches, not much at all. In fact, for a long time, there were no churches. Just small groups of believers secretly worshiping in someone's living room or, more likely, in someone's basement. We can't really lean on the three-legged stool for this one, either. Scripture doesn't give us much. Tradition is all over the place on what churches can or should or shouldn't look

like. And Reason, well, Reason's the reason folks like me have 90 opinions on one issue. If only Jesus had said, "Thou shalt paint the church slate black," then we'd have something to go on. Instead, we're left to our own devices and a bit of tradition and a whole lot of people that want to make this place beautiful and inviting and homey and sacred all at once. But, Jesus didn't. He talked about bigger things, more important things like how to deal with rising anger, betrayal, or lies. Jesus preached forgiveness, and he lived it, too. He was worried about how we live with each other. Jesus saw us, was us, and knew where our hearts wanted to go and all the hiccups of getting us there. Jesus may not have talked about paint, but he sure talked about love.

In Deuteronomy, we're told we have a choice. We can choose the way of life, we can choose to love, and we can choose to serve. Or we can choose something else. Now, I don't want to give the impression that writing down your preference means that choosing green over white or brown over green is choosing between life and death. It's not. But what you do around that vote just might be. Vote for whatever color you're gonna vote for, but choose life and choose love.

A quick sidebar: we all heard those same readings, and I'd be an irresponsible preacher if I didn't say something about divorce after everything Jesus said. It's a nasty thing, divorce, and it doesn't go away once the papers are filed. It echoes on in every major and many minor moments, and it just plain stinks. But also, it is, probably more often than it's used, a necessity. Later on in that same book, Jesus will say Moses made space for divorce because "their hearts were hard." Marriage isn't meant for divorce, it's meant for love and for life. But sometimes people are awful to each other, or one person is awful, or social expectations forced two people together that never should've been together in the first place. And the hardness of one person, or two, or an entire society that refuses to recognize the fullness of what love could be, that hardness of heart makes it so that divorce just has to be an option. We weren't meant for it, but sometimes we desperately need it. Sometimes choosing life and choosing love means that some things need to come to an end.

I'm actually kinda glad that shows up this morning. Because whether we're talking about how to be in relationship or how to care for our neighbors or what color to paint the church, it's so important to choose life, choose love, and choose to keep our hearts soft. How we make these kinds of decisions influences how we make the harder ones. How we love each other with this choice affects how we love our neighbor. How we encounter those who vote differently, believe it or not, reflects how we encounter God. Let's keep our hearts soft and our eyes on love. Choose life. And as you cast that vote, it's your choice, but remember: whatever shall be, shall be.