

The Politics of Christ

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Luke 4:16-21. “When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

I realize that this might not have been the best choice of a sermon topic at this time. After all, why do we come to church but to take refuge from the storm? To escape from the worldly world and focus our hearts and minds on God, on things which bring hope, and strength, and peace. The last thing we need right now is one more venue to stir the pot of political resentments. I will not be endorsing any particular candidate from this pulpit. First of all, that is illegal and would risk us losing our tax-exempt status, and second of all, you don’t want political advice from me. So it is not my intention to get you all fired up about politics.

Another reason this might not have been the best choice of a sermon topic at this time is that, at this stage in the game, the sides have been taken. If you haven’t voted yet, it’s not because you haven’t made up your mind. (and if it is, there’s a great David Sedaris article you should read in this weeks New Yorker) Have you seen a polite political conversation anywhere these past few weeks? Watching people from opposing party lines try to speak peaceably to each other is like watching what happens to my dog, Wilson when the mailman comes around. Wilson goes into attack and protect mode when he senses even the faintest knock at the door. This is a natural reaction on his part, it’s his instinct. I do not wish to invoke that wrathful and protective instinct in you. I’ve heard some of you talk about politics. Even when we agree, sometimes, you frighten me.

The third reason this is might not have been the best choice is that I fear I am opening up you, and our church, for potential public backlash. Who am I to presume I can speak to the politics of Christ? The Bible is a beautiful library of books that can be spliced and diced to support any argument anyone wishes to make on any subject. As a church that proclaims welcome to those of differing understanding and theological opinion, I fear that we might be pushed and tested on this line. If there is a diversity of thought and opinion here, that is a good thing, and something that I support and cherish. In that vein, the thoughts and opinions expressed in this sermon are those of Andy Bachmann. And I approved this message.

Today I come to you as one who is tired of this election season. I am tired of the ads, the rhetoric, the polls, the pundits, the signs, the bumper stickers. I am tired of hearing

people's opinions and predictions. I am weary of this anxious living, and I am ready for it to come to an end.

I have been shocked by some of the things I have seen and heard my fellow Americans say and do in the name of the democratic process these past weeks. Recently, I witnessed a man rant and scream in the supposedly soothing confines of a sauna. Typically, I ignore the conversation. I tune it out. But there was something about this guy...And, what's worse is I know there was not a thing that I could have said that would have changed this man's mind. But the spirit of the season got to me. And I just had to open my big mouth. And I said some words to this man that I now regret. Many of you have stories of political induced hysteria as well.

So today I want to begin by reminding you that there is a higher calling to this life. There are more important things than this election. These are tough times we are living, but I believe that there is something crucial that we need to remember. In the end, it is not John McCain who is going to show up at your house when the next hurricane hits. Barack Obama will not be the one who shows up at your home with a casserole when your mother dies. It is our neighbors who will be there for us. And we will be there for them. Regardless of what political sign they have posted in their lawn. When the adrenaline died down after my 'sauna' incident, and I was embarrassed by my actions, I realized that my faith demands that not only should I embrace this opponent, but that I should love him as well.

However...I also believe that there is boldness to the gospel that demands we take action. I also believe that any action we take, any choice that we make is, inherently, a political choice. Politics is the process by which groups of people make decisions; it is the theory and practice of forming and running organizations typically connected with government, but not always. So, as William Sloane Coffin said, 'the separation of church and state ...is not designed to separate Christians from their politics. For our faith should inform our common life, as well as our personal, more private lives.'

It might surprise you to know that the most common form of contemporary gospel is based primarily in that of the personal transformation. This is the purpose driven life, the power of now, the secret, the gospel of personal wealth and well-being.

I won't deny that personal transformation is something that we all need, and that we all work on. In our last worship theme, *The Soul Station: Maintenance and Repairs*, we spent six weeks giving you tools and techniques to strengthen your personal faith, and deepen your relationship with God. Our compact encourages us to learn from our religious heritage and to grow.

But I hope that we also encourage you to carry that message of personal transformation that we preach here, and carry it through to your neighbors as well.

We practice radical hospitality to many of society's forgotten people. We are a house of love and refuge to many whom society attempts to cast out. Not only are we proud of that, but we are ferocious defenders of our belief that God loves and cares for all people, black and white, young and old, rich and poor, male and female, gay and straight, free and imprisoned, Muslim and Jew. Even democrats and republicans.

We, who, as our compact says, seek to follow Jesus, even imperfectly, in personal involvement with each other must understand that does not mean that we constantly turn the other cheek and love each other.

Jesus was not just a peace-loving preacher who cared for the little children. He was also challenging governing authority by proclaiming a higher power from God. He was mounting a cultural revolution when he welcomed the outcasts as well as the foreigners. He was challenging the religious practices of the day, calling the leaders of the temple hypocrites and liars. He was living in tension with the world, fully engaged in the lives of the people around him, and offering an entirely new message of what it means to be the chosen people of God.

If we seek to follow this example, then we must challenge those who put the power of a few over the lives of the many. It means we be willing to see a higher call to change our country than simply voting for our favorite candidate, and letting them do the rest. It means we be willing to stand up to those who preach a stagnant message of judgment on the few, and stand up to those who would use three verses of the Bible to condemn homosexuality, but not feel impassioned to combat the growing poor in our communities, which is referenced over 2000 times in the Bible. It means that we be willing to sacrifice for the well being of others, and that we be willing to accept the persecutions that are bound to come to us. These are the politics that we are called to stand for.

This is the bond that will strengthen us. Bound together to preach the good news to those who have ears to hear it, and bound to act in Christian concern for the welfare of all people.

As much as we feel like we need to pin our hopes to a political candidate, the politics of Jesus demands that we take the responsibility upon ourselves to change our world. As Martin King said, “in a time when men and women are surrendering the high values of the faith, you must cling to them for children yet unborn. You must be willing to challenge unjust mores, to champion unpopular causes, and to buck the status quo. You are the salt of the earth. You are to be the light of the world. You are to be that vitally active leaven in the lump of the nation.”

I began by giving you three reasons why this sermon might not have been the best choice at this time. But now let me share with you one reason why it is.

In the book of Luke, today’s Biblical reading is the first public act of Jesus ministry. He stood up at a time of great uncertainty in the kingdom of Israel. People were increasingly becoming more and more disenchanted with the governing authorities, both in the religious community and in the government. People were clutching the things they used to rely on for hope; and finding that, because of the occupying fear and resentment of the Roman empire and the influx of cultures and taxation, the old forms of hope were no longer there. So his message of hope, and the way he delivered it, united people across racial lines, political lines, theological lines, cultural lines. It created a community so powerful that the core philosophies still live on (in some forms) today. In this time of great uncertainty, when we face the greatest challenges seen in generations, the message of hope and good news that he offered, which literally set the world in a new light, still offers hope and good news today. Regardless of the political outcome of this election, we

must work together to heal the rifts, and reach out to our neighbors, and to one another, all in the hopes of bringing about the hope and the change that we so desperately desire right now.

I had a brief moment of calm from the storm just the other night. We went to a 'low country boil' hosted by some friends. A block party (that we crashed.) And at that little gathering, I met people across cultural and racial lines. I broke bread with people who most certainly came from a different political persuasion than mine. But in that momentary community, with the very young, and the very old, we were able to support, to love and embrace one another as fellow creatures of God. I watched someone play with my daughter, and get her lemonade. And I carried a chair home for an older woman. It was nothing. And yet, at the same time, it was everything.

That's what it's all about. In just a moment we are going to sing the Servant song. As you've already heard, this is the theme of this years Stewardship campaign. I think it is a most appropriate choice. And as we look ahead, we know these times are going to be tough. And sometimes it's hard to keep the faith in tough times like these. But that is what we come here for. To share each other's burdens. To encourage each other along the way. And to live out our faith as best as we are able.

Oh God,

We watch this morning for the light that the darkness has not overcome.

We listen for the morning dove's call. We feel the cooling caress of your breeze on our faces, and we offer a silent word of thanks for the majesty of your changing seasons.

We reach for the fire that warms our hearts, and we feel it burning inside of us. We reach for the fire of your creation that has burned since the very first day. We reach out to feel creations fire, and we feel in the hearts of those around us.

We watch for the light of your hope and love. We kindle that light within us. We look in the faces of the people we meet, and we see your light glowing within them. The fire that glows inside of us is the same fire that burns in them.

Give us the grace to see your light and glow in faces of those whom we meet. Give us the eyes to see into their hearts and minds, and give us the grace to wish them peace.

Give us the strength to love every part of your creation,

Give us the strength to know what is right.

Give us the power to work towards justice and mercy,

Give us the strength to see your love.

Give us the hopeful promise of your grace within us,

That we may share it with others.

Give us the heart to be in service to others, and the strength to see the journey through.

Amen.