

## **21<sup>st</sup> Sunday after Pentecost**

**"Was Jesus Political?"**

**John 8:31-34**

Then Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." They answered him, "We are descendants of Abraham and have never been slaves to anyone. What do you mean by saying, "You will be made free'?" Jesus answered them, "Very truly, I tell you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin.

In case you have been living under a rock without cable television or the internet and stopped reading the newspaper, there is a national Presidential election happening in 10 days, on November 3. Actually, early voting has already begun with many voting safely and securely by absentee ballot due to the pandemic, while others are lining up, many for hours, to cast their ballot in-person. This certainly is a highly charged and important election, some would say it is the most important election our nation has ever faced. I hope you who are reading this sermon or watching it have either voted or plan to vote on or before November 3. Thank you for doing so!

Now, before I go any further, I can just imagine some of you shaking your head and saying, "Here he goes again, talking politics from the pulpit!" Yes, I am. Why am I doing so? Because I cannot talk about Jesus without talking about politics. Let me share with you words I have shared before to help us reflect together on the politics of Jesus.

Pastor Scott, why do you always talk about politics in your sermons? I don't like it. It makes me uncomfortable. I just want you to preach about Jesus and leave the politics out of it, after all, Jesus wasn't political! These are comments I have heard from church members over the 35 years I have served as a Presbyterian minister. I am not alone. Many of my clergy colleagues of all denominations probably have heard similar statements from their parishioners as well.

Since I also have a teaching degree in Social Studies with an emphasis in Political Science (okay, it was called "Government" when I graduated from college), how people engage in politics is of great interest to me.

Politics is defined as the "art or science of governing" a country or other area by a group of people. We most often associate "politics" with the governing of a nation. However, if you take a closer look at the definition of politics, you will see that it also covers "other areas" by a group of people. Politics is about how we, as people, form ourselves into group structures for social or service or recreational activities. Veterans who join the VFW or American Legion have their own political system, as do civic groups like the Lions or Optimist. Sororities and Fraternity groups on college campuses or in the community have

their own political structure too. So do recreational sports leagues for youth or adults. And then there are our work places. We are all aware of "office politics". Every business or company has its own political system that defines and shapes their business practices and customer service. Faith Communities of all religions on their local and denominational level also have a "political" structure that shapes their belief practices. No matter the group or organization we belong to or the business or company we work for (or possibly own), or school you attend or sport league you play in, we all engage daily in "politics" by just showing up. Even when you choose not to participate or work, you are being "political".

When you understand "politics" in this way, you begin to see it is simply about how we as human beings, in formal and informal ways, relate to one another. All our human relationships and interactions are therefore "Political."

How we live in relationship with one another are shaped by our cultural values and religious/spiritual beliefs, our economic and social needs, and our geographical location within the world community.

Politics is simply about our relationships. Each couple, each family, each home, each extended family is a "political" unit, governed by rules. No, we do not have formal "Constitutions" or a "Bill of Rights," but if you think about it, each of these types of relationships have their own "political" structure. If we get in an argument with our spouse, we are engaging in "political" debate over these unwritten rules. The same with how we raise our children. Children will obey your "rules" until they are teenagers, and then they will challenge your parental "government" ALL THE TIME! You can then remind them, when the "drama" at school starts that they are simply learning about the art of politics, though I am not sure they will understand it in that way. Family structures can be similar to a Democracy or they can be ruled by an "Authoritarian Tyrant". I would suggest that most marriages and family systems are "Socialist," as all resources are pooled together and shared for the common good of the whole, each as has need.

Now, back to Jesus. Was he "political"? Yes, Jesus was. He was very political, because God is political. When God created all human kind (and not just your kind or their kind, but all human kind) in God's own image, God engaged in a political activity. Creation of all that is, including you and me, and them and theirs, is simply an act of creating a community. For those of us, who are people of faith, we believe God calls, no commands us, to "Love God" first and foremost above all us, and then secondly, to love others as love God. Why? Because in the act of loving the "other" even those who we might view as "different" than us because of their social norms, cultural values, religious beliefs (even lack of them in our mind), or national identity or "legal" status, we are loving the sacred image of God found in them (and in us).

Jesus engaged in "God's Politics" of Love, Grace, Mercy, Compassion, Forgiveness, Healing the Untouchable, Welcoming the Stranger, Including the Outcast, Reconciling Human Differences, and Redeeming Us All. Jesus

challenged our understanding of human relationships with one another, including our enemies.

In inviting us to "Love one another as I have loved you," Jesus invited us, as God did in the act of creation, to engage in the political act of relating to one another in God's sacred community.

As a pastor, I cannot talk about, preach about, teach about Jesus without talking about "politics" because politics is simply about how we, as followers of Jesus, the beloved children of God, are called to live in relationship with one in the whole wide world.

As person of faith who professes to be a follower of Jesus, you cannot worship or pray, sing or talk about Jesus if you want to avoid being "political." To do so, is to engage in "politics", and I would dare add, God's "radical" form of politics defined by and structured around the two greatest commandments of Love.

If you are tired of hearing your preacher talk about "politics" then you have to really ask yourself what she or he (and that includes me) is to talk about? The weather?

"God is love and those who love abide in God and God abides in them." (1 John 4:16). That is one very radical, politically charged idea. To believe it, well, be careful, it just might change the world. Even more radical is the thought that it might just change your "political" views around how you are to relate to other people in this, God's world.