

MORE BIG LOVE

THE POLITICS OF GOD

God of deep soil and lush growth; you call us from our shallow selves to find our depth in you: may we abide in the One who can teach us who we are; through Jesus Christ, the true vine.

from Prayers for an Inclusive Church, Steven Shakespeare

MAY 2, 2021
THE FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER
1 John 4:7-21, Psalm 22:24-30, John 10:11-18
ST. MARK'S-IN-THE-VALLEY
 EPISCOPAL CHURCH AND PRESCHOOL
 Los Olivos, California
 THE REV. RANDALL C.K. DAY, D.MIN., PRIEST AND RECTOR

MAY I SPEAK AND MAY WE HEAR FROM THE HEART OF THE LIVING GOD
 WHO IS CREATING, REDEEMING, AND SANCTIFYING US.

God has politics.

That's why the church can't stay out of politics.

The most political verse in the Bible may be John 3:16: "God so loved the world..." And God's most political act may have been the incarnation, giving Jesus to live as one of us. "9 God's love was revealed in our midst in this way: by sending the Only Begotten into the world." (1 John 4:9)

God's politics flow from that.

Our call to live according to the politics of God is rooted in the love we hear about in the First Letter of John: "Beloved, let us love one another because love is of God; everyone who loves comes from God and has knowledge of God. 8 Those

who do not love have known nothing of God, for God is love."

Have we known nothing of God? Or do we love?

The word "politics" has at its root the word "polis," referring to the ancient Greek city-state, meaning the broader society, public life, the world. God's politics encompass God's whole dominion. God's politics concern mutual sharing of power and resources for the care of all of God's people and stewarding the created order within God's realm (contrasted with partisan politics that focus on competing groups and individuals amassing power and hoarding and controlling resources to the benefit of a few and to the detriment of the

earth and loss of freedom for many people).

In Jesus, God explicitly entered and engaged public human affairs that concern all the world and the cosmos. And so, as The Rev. Luke Powery, Dean of the Chapel at Duke University says: "It's inescapable: we are in the world and the world is a political world. If we live in the world, we are engaged in the political" [sorting out, for good or ill, power and resources]. He points out that the gospel is whole and it has only one environment or arena. God is not limited to a narrow domain (such as a church or religious group – organized like a social club, a cozy backdrop of traditions and customs for certain families and individuals) while economics, agency, status, gender, nature, somehow have a reality that Reality Itself cannot and does not touch. God is not a pawn of "Temporary Big Shots" (as the late Senator John Danforth referred to federal officials) – whether in government or business or various social circles.

No, when God loves the world, it is the whole, actual world. From today's scripture readings: "¹⁰ Love, then, consists in this: not that we have loved God, but that God has loved us and has sent the Only Begotten to be an offering for our sins."

No one has to "qualify" for this love – or even identify with it to have

it – it is God's perpetual choice and gift (call it grace).

To stay out of the politics of God is to stay out of our own lives of loving the really real, and would be to stay out of everything that God cares about, to stay away from all that God creates and loves and does.

Our politics transform when they are encompassed by God's politics, including God's bias for the poor, the oppressed, the least, lost and left out. How did we just hear it? "¹⁹ We love because God first loved us. ²⁰ If you say you love God but hate your sister or brother, you are a liar. For you cannot love God, whom you have not seen, if you hate your neighbor, whom you have seen. ²¹ If we love God, we should love our sisters and brothers as well; we have this commandment from God." (1 John 4:19-21)

To disrespect, ignore, overlook, deny, exclude or exploit our neighbor is to hate our neighbor (whom we *have* seen, even if we have not seen them fully, truly, in their depth).

The refugee, the immigrant, the homeless: all of these Jesus embraced as he lived as one who had no place to lay *his* head. And so the church continues doing as he did: mirroring the lived experience of human beings continuing in all of the complexity of the entire created realm.

To the extent that we have been awake and are awakened in

this recent year of global crisis, God's has given us the opportunity to see and experience the reality of the interconnectedness that has been writ large in the COVID pandemic, in the racial reckoning that is underway, and in the partisan political and economic upheaval that is unfolding. Jesus says: "⁴ *Live on in me, as I do in you.* Just as a branch cannot bear fruit of itself apart from the vine, neither can you bear fruit apart from me. ⁵ I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who live in me and I in them will bear abundant fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing." Apart from God we *are* nothing. [My teacher, James Finley says that if God were to quit loving him, at that moment he would cease to exist... and if at any moment God quit loving the world, the world would cease to exist. (Not a threat... but saying how integral God's love is to life.)]

The politics of God cannot be collapsed into the politics of a political party – the gospel cannot be politicized. This reality can hardly be appreciated by those who spend several hours a day watching news pundits and one hour a week (or less) taking in the good news of God. The politics of God do not shrink to

fit a narrow agenda nor do they shy away from showing the world the true state of the world, including the economic disparity that is ruining human lives and destabilizing cultures. And where a border may be seen as a barrier, God's politics change all would-be borders, boundaries, and divisions into dynamic zones of meeting, listening, joining, embrace, and creativity. We are drawn into intersections where we encounter others, including those we may think of as "the other," as surely as the cross itself is an eternal intersection of all of God and all of life on earth. God's politics draw humanity into rootedness, remembering, belonging, sharing God's abundance, God's generosity.

Jesus says: "¹⁷ Love will come to perfection in us when we can face the day of judgment without fear— *because our relation to this world is just like Christ's.* ¹⁸ There is no fear in love, for perfect love drives out fear. To fear is to expect punishment, and anyone who is afraid is still imperfect in love."

Hear it again: "...our relation to this world is just like Christ's."

In that, we hear the politics of God.

I close with this prayer by Rachel Srubas from Bill Schultz's *Edge of Atlantic* blog:

Many will Come
~Rachel Srubas~

Today, may I walk in right paths, in God's light.
 May peace prosper the steps of my family and friends,
 in city streets and buildings, and among all nations.
 Today, may people stream from east and west to converge
 in God's neighborhood.
 May nations labor to dismantle barricades.
 May our city be a just, peaceable center, united and vibrant.
 May my friends and relations strive for the good of each other,
 and may I remember I am neither higher nor lower
 than a servant.
 Today, may east and west meet in my right and left hands,
 complementing, comprehending one another.
 In my body, may north and south correspond,
 lifting my mind above worry,
 grounding my feet on the earth.
 Today may I know what I am: created, not self-made,
 instructed to walk and work in God's ways.
 May I hammer old knives into new spoons, old enmities into love.
 May I respect the least functional part of myself
 as surely as Jesus cherishes a paralytic slave
 and saves him with a word.
 May the shriveled and disused part of my heart
 be bathed in God's mercy today,
 that I might see sunlight for what it is:
 the gaze that beholds and heals us all.
 In a banquet hall spacious enough for a whole world of nations,
 may I rest among neighbors and strangers,
 friends and relations.
 May we feast among prophets on food
 grown in plowed mountain soil,
 reaped with weapons repurposed as tools.



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