

Lent II Year C 2025

I had a meeting last week with several local clergy in Mobile. Not Episcopal clergy... various denominations, even the Rabbi from Springhill Temple. Just to talk about stuff. One of them said that he had made the decision not to talk about politics; that he was just going to talk about Jesus. Hard to argue with that. According to the American Heritage Dictionary, the word, politics has to do with matters of the government, matters of the state. The word comes from the Greek word *polis*, Plato's coinage for the city state, the organized means by which citizens could live lives of dignity and well-being in community. Plato believed that, like all forms in earth, the polis represented, at least in part, the divine order of the heavenly city, in which life was lived in common. The polis as a divine reflection should be efficient, beautiful in its symmetry, egalitarian; each citizen attending to the needs of other. In our American culture we tend to conflate the two terms politics and partisan, but the two are decidedly different. Partisan, of course means a particular allegiance to a candidate, or a party; whereas the term politics simply means the means by which we order our common life. How we live together. So I think it can be said that politics, is that about which the Gospels are first and foremost concerned.

Salvation, the lofty goal of the Gospels, and the whole of scripture, for that matter, is concerned not whether we go to heaven or not, but with how we live together as sustainable community. In other words, salvation has less to do with the individual, and much more to do with our lives as neighbors, our lives in community, and

our profound responsibility as to the community's viability. Jesus argues that compassion and mercy, welcome and justice, sacrifice for the good of the whole; care for each other, are the means for such a sustainable community. God's way of things, in short. At its heart, Jesus's theology presupposes that there is abundance in God's world... that there is enough sustenance for all. Our role, as people of God, is to see that that abundance is shared. That makes injustice, and the poverty and violence engendered by it, the cardinal sin of our world; that which we stand against as God's people. I would say that injustice is salvation's opposite. So the goal is to order our common life justly, loving our neighbor as we love ourselves.

The engine of injustice is self-interest, which makes the Gospel imperatives so very counter-cultural; self-interest being the false god over the course of history.... Throughout human history that has been true, but perhaps now more than ever, particularly in our own capitalist system, we are seeing the destructive designs of self-interest, in a country that considers self-interest a virtue. In the United States, the wealthiest country in the world, the gap between rich and poor is growing exponentially. Our system is stacked against women and people of color; our government as we speak is becoming a self-promoting plutocracy. The rich will get richer; the poor, poorer. Abundance is now hoarded by the elite on the backs of the economically weak and voiceless.... It was declared by pope John the 23rd at The Second Vatican council in 1964, not without controversy and backlash, that God holds a

preferential option for the poor, recognizing in Jesus's teaching that all are entitled to share in God's abundance; that "poor lives matter." ...that shared wealth is good for the whole; that self-interest undermines a sustainable society; that unbridled capitalism would be our undoing. We now see the gross underbelly of that reality.

The problem, of course, as it has been for over three thousand years, or more.... The problem is Empire: Power and thus, wealth, hoarded at the apex of an intractable hierarchy; a caste system of inequality.... Whether modern democracies, or autocratic governments, that structure is embedded in our world. And such a system breeds catastrophic consequences; and such a system is, at least according to history, unsustainable. Empires rise and fall.... And in our own day we are seeing the beginnings of the fall of the empire that is the United States of America. It has taken a while, but it has been coming for a long time. We should not be surprised. Perhaps the pain of it all is the mere recognition of a mere and certain inevitability.

I'm talking politics of course, because politics is the business of the people of God. How we live together matters the most for us. Jesus's life and ministry was intensely political. I don't have to remind you that he was executed by the government for being a political subversive. Moreover, the Gospels are pieces of political rhetoric exhorting their audience to keep the true faith in the face of power gone very wrong. The Gospels can't be read, much less understood, outside the context of living under the oppression of Empire.

We don't have to read between the lines to know that Luke's Gospel is unashamedly political. In the very prologue we hear Mary's song calling for the deposition of princes and kings; calling for the end to the hoarding of wealth by the powerful; calling for the end of poverty in a world of abundance; calling for the dignity for those living in shame. She's calling for a new world order; God's order... and Luke will continue that theme throughout the entirety of his subversive Gospel.

In today's reading, Jesus gets word that his ministry, his preaching and teaching, have caught the attention of Herod Antipas, the vassal of Rome for the region. Jesus has been calling out the injustice and outright perfidy of the system, and has actually named Herod in his accusations. Herod is threatening his life. And rather than holding his peace, going silent in the face of certain danger, Jesus turns his face toward Jerusalem, the seat of power; the spiritual home, no less, of Judaism, whose leadership have sold out to the status quo. More Politics. He notes that the rulers of Jerusalem, both government and Temple, when confronted by the truth, will act murderously: "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it." So, Jesus and his followers head for Jerusalem where they plan to protest. Jesus refers to the first protest at the end of this very passage. "You will not see me until the time comes when you say, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord." He is, of course, referring to his entrance into Jerusalem, that which we celebrate on Palm Sunday. The church over the centuries has referred to this as Jesus's triumphant entry

into Jerusalem, where the people there welcome him as king... but nobody in Jerusalem would have known who Jesus was.... His ministry was in Galilee... no texting or Facebook back in the day.... No, this was a staged protest; a protest mocking the powers that be... mocking the pageantry of the royal processions into the Holy City.... And then there would be another protest in the Temple... Jesus turning over the tables of the money brokers.... The Temple leadership, of course in cahoots with the ruling hierarchy.

So this is political activism, plain and simple, against the powers and principalities of Jesus's known world... I can only imagine the courage such action would require.... But a huge question: What difference would it make? Jesus was run out of his hometown for not keeping quiet. A loose cannon, a mere rabble-rouser, they say. Too political, they said. And who would have the ego to presume to call for a new world order, when the powers and principalities are so entrenched, and so dangerous. In the grand scheme of things, what does Jesus and the few who follow him have to offer up and against the might of Imperial power? The answer is simple: They have the truth... and brothers and sisters the truth is invincible. The truth is our immunity, as it were, against the world falling apart. We well may not see its effects for generations, but the truth will find its way into the collective mind and soul of the world... and greed, and ignorance, and arrogance can't survive against it. Empires and the systems of greed and elite power will rise and fall; but truth will stand forever. Jesus's witness to us, good people, is that the truth is worth dying for.

Our sword, if you will, our weapon against the might of injustice is truth, and the battle is already won. If resurrection means anything, it means that the truth cannot die; that it will live forever, from generation to generation borne by the people of God. It is Love that gives life to the truth, and Love is stronger than any adversary. Amid every catastrophe that has bedeviled humankind, it is the truth that has had the final say. I think that it is enough for us in this apocalyptic time, to hold fast to what is true, and to speak it and act upon it when so called. I remind you again.... Our faith is a public faith. It is not a private matter. Our faith belongs to the world. It belongs to the world's transformation and its redemption. The truth belongs in the public square calling to account the evil that rages against us.... And if that makes our faith political, then so be it.