

“Apple Sauce”
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Overbrook Presbyterian Church
29th Sunday in Ordinary Time
October 18, 2020

Scripture Reading: Ephesians 1:15-23 (The Message)

¹⁵⁻¹⁹ ...When I heard of the solid trust you have in the Master Jesus and your outpouring of love to all the followers of Jesus, I couldn't stop thanking God for you—every time I prayed, I'd think of you and give thanks. But I do more than thank. I ask—ask the God of our Master, Jesus Christ, the God of glory—to make you intelligent and discerning in knowing him personally, your eyes focused and clear, so that you can see exactly what it is he is calling you to do, grasp the immensity of this glorious way of life he has for his followers, oh, the utter extravagance of his work in us who trust him—endless energy, boundless strength!

²⁰⁻²³ All this energy issues from Christ: God raised him from death and set him on a throne in deep heaven, in charge of running the universe, everything from galaxies to governments, no name and no power exempt from his rule. And not just for the time being, but *forever*. He is in charge of it all, has the final word on everything. At the center of all this, Christ rules the church. The church, you see, is not peripheral to the world; the world is peripheral to the church. The church is Christ's body, in which he speaks and acts, by which he fills everything with his presence.



Sermon: Apple Sauce

On Tuesday of this past week, Mary and I went down to the Franklin County Board of Elections and cast our votes. All told, it was a quick and painless experience. Everyone social distanced. Everyone wore masks. And it was really, really fast! The line wrapped all the way around the building, but from the time we got in line until the time we were walking out with our cool new “Ohio Vote” stickers, it all took just 40 minutes.

So, there's two things I want to encourage you to do today. The first is I want you to vote. Early voting has already started. If you don't feel comfortable going in to vote in person, you can still request an absentee ballot up until Noon on October 31. But however you do it, please vote. I believe voting is important, for several reasons. Voting is a right. Voting is a privilege. Voting is a responsibility. But voting is also a spiritual discipline.

Now, the Bible says nothing explicit about voting or how to participate in a democracy. That's because government in the Old Testament was largely autocratic or tribal and at the time the New Testament was written that part of the world was dominated by the Roman Empire. The right to govern was seen as coming from God and not from the consent of the governed. So, while there is some scriptural advice on how to be a citizen in a monarchy or an empire, there is none on how to vote in a representative democracy. But that's not to say that there is nothing in scripture to guide us through this potentially harrowing process.

Which brings us to the second thing I want you to do: I want you to consider what Jesus calls us to do and be, and then let your vote be an extension of that belief. Now there are a lot of people who will cry foul here. “Separation of Church and State! We shouldn't bring our religious beliefs into our political lives.” But I believe that's incorrect.

Do you remember those little lunch trays they used to use in school? The ones with the different sections for different foods. There was one for your milk carton, another for your Salisbury steak, a smaller one for your vegetable. Everything was kept separate, in its own place. Well, sometimes we like to keep our lives compartmentalized like those little trays. Church stuff over here. Hobbies over here. Family in the middle. Election stuff over there. But if you remember those trays, then you also remember that sometimes the cafeteria worker would slap a big ole spoonful of something messy on your tray, like apple sauce, that would slop over into the other compartments.

Well, we may like to keep our lives compartmentalized like those trays, but as disciples of Christ, our loyalty to God, and Jesus' lordship over our lives is like that big ole sloppy scoop of apple sauce that doesn't stay in its little compartment but comes sloshing out all over everything else! When we say that Jesus is Lord of our lives, that means all of it. If you are a disciple, that means there is not a single section of your life that shouldn't have at least a little Jesus in it.

Besides, the separation of church and state only works one way. The first amendment to the constitution of the United States says this: “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof...”¹ That means Congress cannot create or endorse a particular church or set of beliefs. It doesn't say anything about your ability to bring your religious beliefs into your participation in the political process.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. got involved in the civil rights movement as an expression of his faith in Jesus Christ. William Sloan Coffin dedicated his career as a Presbyterian pastor to fighting injustice as an expression of his faith in Jesus Christ. Every day Christian people advocate and work for fair housing and equal access to health care and racial justice as an expression of their faith in Jesus Christ.

I've been told before "I don't like to hear politics from the pulpit," but Jesus Christ was very political. As Messiah, Jesus, by definition posed a challenge to the political powers and principalities of this world. Jesus called people to be loyal to God's Kingdom, not the Roman Empire. The Romans didn't crucify Jesus because he was blasphemous, they crucified him because he posed a threat to Roman civil authority.

Our politics and our faith interact because they address many of the same things. We vote and pass laws on important matters like how we work, where we live, how we treat one another, all the time and that makes those things political. But our faith also guides us on those same issues. So, it should be almost impossible to keep them apart and when they do collide, it should be our faith that influences our politics and not the other way around. Remember, the Church is not peripheral to the world. The world is peripheral to the Church.

In the passage we read this morning from Ephesians, Paul makes it clear that Jesus is Lord, not just of the church, but of all that is. That means in every part of our lives we submit to the guidance and authority of Jesus Christ. Not just some of the time, and not just in some things, but in everything. And that includes our votes.

If we think of our lives as those elementary school lunch trays I was talking about earlier, then we have to expect the apple sauce of Jesus Christ to get all over everything else on our tray, whether we want it to or not. Monday morning commute, apple sauce. Thursday afternoon yoga class, apple sauce! Wednesday night Zoom meeting, apple sauce! Tuesday in the voting booth... we should be covered, dripping, swimming in apple sauce.

If we are disciples of Jesus Christ and we believe we should live as he taught, then the government we choose to represent us should reflect our dedication to what Christ teaches us to do and be. And we desperately need that. It has become clear to me that people of faith need to be more active in the way our country and our communities are governed. Some more fundamentalist Christians don't seem to have a problem with this. Pollsters even refer to "Evangelical Christians" as a voting bloc. But it's time for the rest of us to get involved, too, because our elected officials seem to have lost track of Christ in their governing and decision making.

Because Jesus healed the sick and the infirmed. Jesus brought sight to the blind and gave crippled people the ability to walk. He cured a little boy's epilepsy and a woman's 12-year flow of blood. The health and well-being of human beings mattered to Jesus. Yet in the midst of a global pandemic, we have become a nation where the most basic and effective means of slowing transmission of the virus is minimized and those who advocate for those basic safety measures are ridiculed. We have become a nation that is, in the middle of a pandemic, fighting in court to overturn a law that provides health care coverage to millions of people who would otherwise not have it.

That is not a government guided by the authority of Jesus Christ.

Jesus taught that the greatest law is to love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength and to love your neighbor as yourself. Jesus taught that we are also to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us. But we have become a nation divided against itself, where hate groups are emboldened and those in office seek to deepen divisions for the sake of their own power. And we have enabled them to do so.

That is not a government guided by the authority of Jesus Christ.

Jesus taught that we are to welcome the stranger and he bid the little children come to him because to such as these belong the Kingdom of God. Yet we have become a nation that turns away the stranger, separates them from their children, and holds those children under lock and key.

That is not a government guided by the authority of Jesus Christ.

Jesus taught that he came as an expression of God's love for all the world; for everyone. He did not draw distinction between people but loved and served them all regardless of gender and race. John 3:16 says for God so loved *the world*. Jesus stood for justice and freedom from oppression for all people. But we have become a nation where injustice and oppression are often tolerated in the name of "law and order."

That is not a government guided by the authority of Jesus Christ.

Jesus taught that you can't serve two masters, because you will love one and hate the other; you can't serve God and money. And Jesus taught us not to build new barns to store up our abundance but to share what we have and thus store up treasure in heaven. Yet we have become a nation willing to sell its soul for a tax cut.

That is not a government guided by the authority of Jesus Christ.

But we can change all that. We can work to overcome what we have allowed. We can atone for our sins as a nation and redeem our poor choices of the past with better ones in the future. And that begins with voting. Each of us must make our own choice and so I encourage you to make yours. But the choice we make should be one we would be confident explaining to God face to face.

It would be naïve to think that every politician would be attuned to the will of God. And that every voter would be voting in the interest of God's Kingdom. But in so much as we have a voice in how our community, our state, our nation is run, as disciples of Jesus Christ we would be negligent in not taking that opportunity and treating it as an act of discipleship and a spiritual discipline.

As with everything else in our lives, and everything else in this world, what we do in the voting booth is subject to the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ. May our discernment lead us to your will, Oh God. And may our efforts in seeking to follow you and work toward your Kingdom be always consistent with what you would have us do and be.

To God be all glory, honor, power, and dominion, in this world and in the world that is to come., Amen.

End Notes

¹ "The Bill of Rights: A Transcription." *America's Founding Documents*. National Archives and Records Administration, n.d. Web. 08 Nov. 2016. <<https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/bill-of-rights-transcript>>.