

Jeremiah 23:1-6
Luke 1:68-79

Colossians 1:11-20
Luke 23:33-43

I want to be entirely transparent about this morning's sermon. Most, if not all of you, know I am a registered Democrat and my personal politics leans to the left. I also want to make it clear that this is not going to be a Democratic sermon, or a Republican sermon. This is going to be a "Bible thumping sermon." What I mean by that is that—for those of us who proclaim Christ as King—ours is the platform of the Bible, not a Democratic or a Republican platform. At times a policy we support may seem like the platform of one political party or another, but it can be a coincidence. At one Presbytery meeting someone moved that the presbytery send a letter to our Nebraska politicians that we stand opposed to drilling within the Arctic Circle. One pastor stood up and started lambasting the motion as nothing more than the Democratic platform. I wanted to stand up and say, "For me, it is not the Democratic platform. It is a Christian platform. You and I may disagree as to how safe it is to drill up there, but I oppose the drilling because of my belief, my belief that God gave us this planet to care for, not abuse and rape." I was not in support because I am a Democrat! I was in support because as one who proclaims Christ as King, I oppose anything that I feel may further pollute our environment. As Timothy Merrill, the Executive Editor of HomileticsOnline.com write, "However we voted—we must remember and put into practice our theology which transcends human and artificial labels."

Today is Christ the King Sunday, also referred to as the Reign of Christ. We proclaim today that Christ is the King of kings, that as Christians we belong to the reign of Christ. It is a day appropriate for considering what it means to declare Christ is King. It is appropriate to consider what are appropriate policies for the reign of Christ. If we

declare that Christ is the King of Kings, what does that mean for us as Christians? If we proclaim Christ as King, then what are the political policies for which we should advocate? What should be our values.

We all want Mr. Trump to be a successful president and to move our nation forward. However, many observed the recent presidential campaign with a sense of dismay and disbelief. All of the racist, misogynist, and xenophobic rhetoric must cease. That should not be characteristic of anyone who proclaims Christ as King. Trump claims to be a Christian, and we should not question that. As far as we know Trump is not a Presbyterian. He has mentioned Marble Collegiate Church in New York City, once the pulpit of Norman Vincent Peale. But that is a Reformed Church in America congregation, not Presbyterian. We should not question his claim to be a Christian. Even if you could care less if our nation is based on Christian values, we need to be civil to one another if we want to have a healthy democracy. We need to be civil to one another. This rhetoric contributes to incivility. As far as I know we have not heard that kind of rhetoric coming from Trump since the election. Hopefully that rhetoric ended with the campaign.

So what are God's political policies? For what policies are we as Christians to advocate? In Micah we read: "What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and walk humbly with your God." Jesus tells us that we are to feed the hungry, give water to the thirsty, welcome the stranger, clothe the naked, care for the sick, visit those in prison. Paul declared that God's people are quite diverse, and that we all need one another. The vision of Scripture is to love our neighbors as ourselves and

to honor all people, regardless of their race, gender, sexual orientation, or nationality. Each person is a beloved child of God.

This is the kind of vision we are to put before our leaders. We need to remember that we are theologians, not politicians. Our job is put God's vision before our politicians. Granted, we live in a very complex world. The solutions to these problems are not easy. We may disagree about how our politicians can make God's vision a reality. How can we have affordable health care that is available to all people? How can we have a fair and just immigration system? How can we feed the hungry? Those are questions to be answered by the politicians, problems to be solved by our politicians. Their job is to enact God's vision. It is their job to make that vision a reality.

Some may argue that it is not the government's role? Some Christians have told me it is not the government's role to do all of this. Our reading from Jeremiah answers that question. Jeremiah declares what is the business of governmental leaders. The passage begins with Jeremiah announcing for God, "Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture! says the Lord." The shepherds have driven the sheep away, and have not attended to them. God declares that he will attend to these who have done evil things. Who are the shepherds doing the evil things? Who are the sheep. The shepherds refer to the kings of Judah and the sheep are the people of Judah. As the Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann wrote, "The compelling metaphor of sheep and shepherd makes a powerful political statement." Our political leaders are to be like shepherds. That metaphor implies care and compassion. As Dr. Brueggemann points out, "the entire program is care for the marginal and powerless. God declares that the business of government is to care for the marginal and

powerless. That is the business of kings.” The kings are to show strong support for the socially weak and marginal. But the kings have failed to do so. The monarchy has been critiqued as disobedient and irresponsible. The political leaders are to care for the hungry, the poor, the homeless, the sick. Our leaders have a responsibility to care for the marginalized, the disenfranchised, the oppressed. What would Jeremiah say about our political leaders today?

It has been purported that President Jimmy Carter once said, “If you don’t want your tax dollars to help the poor, then STOP saying that you want a country based on Christian Values, because you don’t!” Actually it was a comment made by the comedian John Fugelsang. Fugelsang was responding to a comment made by Congressman Stephen Fincher from Tennessee. Fincher was a fierce opponent of food aid for poor Americans, and used Scripture to support his opposition. But it was a misuse of Scripture. Fugelsang was pointing out the hypocrisy of Christians who use Scripture to turn their back on the poor, which led. Fugelsang to declare, ““If you don’t want your tax dollars to help the poor, then STOP saying that you want a country based on Christian Values, because you don’t!”

Our theology should define and shape our political ideology. To have our political ideology define and shape theology is to deny that Christ is King. A pastor I know shared a story about a friend who spends the winters in Arizona. This friend attends a particular church in Arizona and the pastor knows what church. When the friend came back after winter, the pastor asked him about the church. The friend says he does not go to that church anymore. Then the pastor asked the friend why not, he answered that it was because that church helps the undocumented immigrants by providing water in

the dessert and other forms of aid. The pastor friend commented that the Bible says we are to welcome the strangers and welcome aliens. To which his friend said, "The hell with the Bible." It is my hope that our belief as Christians about what the government is to do does not declare the same thing.

Blessed be the Lord our God. Amen.