

Grace and peace to you all from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ - amen.

Have you ever heard the expression “one should never discuss politics or religion in polite company”?

It’s an old piece of advice that many of us have come to follow - especially when we are meeting people for the first time, or we are trying to survive and navigate our work places, or even family dinners.

After all, many of us have at least one horror story about being trapped in the midst of an uncomfortable political or religious conversation we wish we could have escaped.

And as a result of these experiences, we have come to think that by not talking about these matters we will simply avoid making other people uncomfortable or save ourselves from undue conflict within our community.

Some of us have even come to take this statement to heart - to such a degree - that we won’t even share our views on religion or politics when we are invited to do so within a safe space.

Which means that by and large - we end up having a lot of polite conversations about the weather or our gardens with those we come to meet - and if we are feeling particularly feisty we might even decide to discuss how the Oilers are doing in mixed company.

And while these conversations help pass the time - we all have to admit they aren’t particularly life giving.

When novelist and poet Juliana Baggott was being questioned on the issue of our engagement with these topics she chose to respond by saying:

*“I believe that one of the most damning things about our culture is the adage to never talk religion and politics. Because we don't model this discourse at the dinner table...we don't know how to do it well and we're not teaching our children about the world and about how to discuss it.”*

In a way, by not talking about these central matters of our life and our faith we have come to do a disservice to not only our friends and family - but also ourselves.

Many of us haven't had a chance to learn how to talk about some of our most important beliefs and concerns and so we simply don't know what to do or how to respond when we are given the chance to do so.

Yet, this isn't something we have come to learn from the Bible or even the teachings of our namesake Martin Luther.

But Luther has often been misquoted for his ideas on how the church should relate to the political world in which we live.

When Martin Luther came to argue for the separation of "church and state" during the reformation he wasn't advocating for the church to become completely devoid of its political concerns or for the state to absolve itself from any form of belief.

If anything Luther was arguing that both politics and faith had an equal and balanced place in our life and world today. A balance that could only be kept if each party truly wished the other to succeed - and through a set of checks and balances they could help one another to steward and care for their communities needs more holistically.

So for Luther - the role of the church was to care for the wellbeing of God's people while also ensuring elected officials governed all of creation in a just and equitable way. (like advocating for education to be offered to women and children as well as men all the way back in the 1500's)

And the role of elected officials was to ensure the right order of the society was followed while overseeing the church was not abusing people through its religious power (like through the unfair practice of selling indulgences).

In teaching about these matters, Luther hoped to free us, the church, and our elected officials to do the work we had each been gifted to do within the world.

And in a perfect society this would have meant the equitable push and pull between church and state would have balanced us out over time - allowing us all to live in peace and prosperity together.

Yet this has never come to take place - even in Jesus day.

Which is why throughout his life, death, and resurrection, we witness Jesus as a faithful and political force within the coming of God's kingdom here on earth.

For Jesus, the kingdom of God was not some far off and lofty place you would go after you died.

The kingdom of God was and is the in-breaking of the Triune Ones justice, healing, and grace within our world that we are actively being invited to take part in.

A teaching we can see clearly in the prayer Jesus taught us and his disciples to say:

*Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread, forgives us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us, and lead us not to temptation, and deliver us from evil.*

A prayer he came to realize throughout his ministry - but one that became especially important during his last days.

When Jesus entered Jerusalem riding a donkey just before Passover, he wasn't just drawing attention to himself for dramatic effect - he was knowingly performing a political act against the powers of the Roman Empire unlike any the ancient world had seen.

Back in those days, a political ruler's entry into a city set the tone for their coming occupation. Often Roman rulers would enter a city on the backs of war horse to show their power and domination over their people. And through a politic of violence, oppression, and greed they would come to guarantee their rule across each region. Leaving a wake of people rushing to lay their cloaks and palms to honour the coming ruler to ensure their families would be saved from the waves of coming destruction.

But that was not the politic Jesus chose to embrace.

On Palm Sunday, Jesus revealed a subversive way to name power in God's name when he road into the great festival city of Jerusalem on a lowly donkey.

While this fulfilled the ancient prophecy of Zechariah, it also set the tone for all that would come to take place during the celebration of the Passover that year.

As you might recall the festival of the Passover was a time when the Jewish people remembered the ways God had acted to deliver the Israelites from slavery under the Egyptians rule.

However, Passover was not only a time to remember their journey to freedom long ago - it was also a time for the Jewish people to remember God's great covenantal promises they had yet to receive. That one day they would have a king that would set the great scales of justice right. A leader from the house of David who would come to set their people free once and for all. A peaceful ruler who would make the lion lie down with the lamb never threatening them with violence like all those who had come before him.

So as the crowds came to meet Jesus - spreading their cloaks on the ground and waved their palm branches shouting "hosanna (save us) Son of David" they weren't just welcoming a new ruler - they were naming and claiming their long awaited king. The one they believed had come to free their people from the bounds of the Roman occupation that had taken over their holy city.

Yet, when Jesus rode into Jerusalem that Passover he wasn't announcing his run for public office - or even gathering support for a rebellious government take over. He was actively revealing that the coming kingdom of God runs in contrast to the reign of the great powers and political systems that have long tried to influence creation through power, violence, oppression, and greed.

He was declaring that the politics of the kingdom of God stand centred in humility, service, forgiveness, and a nonviolent love that embrace all people. That they uphold that everyone should have their daily bread, that we should not only seek to forgive debts and sins, but avoid the temptation to commit evil against our neighbours in the first place, the politics of the kingdom of God calls us into a life centred in Christ's grace and forgiveness.

But embracing this kind of stance is risky business...

After all we all know that the politics of Jesus would lead him to the cross, where he suffered and died for a world that simply could not accept the radical kingdom of God that was breaking-in before them.

And maybe that is why we too are so afraid of sharing about these central tenants of our politics and our faith.

We know that standing up for justice in the face of oppression can truly be a costly thing.

We have seen the ways the world has taken advantage of those who choose to turn the other cheek.

And we know just how broken we all truly can be.

Yet - Jesus chooses again and again - in the face of these same trials and pain to follow the ways and politics of the kingdom of God even as he spoke some of his final words from the cross - "Father, forgive them."

Christ's life, death, and resurrection do not just call us to embrace a greater personal ethic within our world; they call us to embrace the very in-breaking kingdom of God within each and every aspect of our life which drastically changes who and whose we are.

We have each been given amazing minds and hearts to not only learn about God - but also to understand, care for, and provide for all of creation as God's stewards here on earth.

To do this - we can't simply observe our world from a safe vantage point far beyond its cares and concerns.

We are instead called to enter the world as Christ did - often throwing himself into political and religious confusion - in the midst of palm branches and crosses, to help open a dialogue between peoples and nations who had long been at odds - listening and seeking to find justice, peace, and restoration for all - a holy act done in the name of God's ever coming kingdom.

So children of God at Holy Spirit - know, trust, and believe, that you have all been given the gifts and the holy responsibility to speak up about the issues that matter not only to us, but to our neighbours, and for the well-being of all creation this election season.

Whether you are planning on casting your ballot for the New Democrats, the Conservatives, or the Liberals. Whether you are supporting the Green Party, the Alberta party, or an independent candidate - this Tuesday, April 16th - know that our journey with Christ to welcome the in-breaking kingdom of God continues well beyond the term any party may come to serve - because God is never done working in, through, and with us all - in love, in grace, and in hope within this world.

So as you carry out the holy work of raising your voice and vote this week - know that you are engaging in transformative and just work within our world - and be blessed as you do it.

Amen.