Sermon | Proper 26C

TEXT: Acts 5:29; Romans 13:1-7; Mt. 22:15-22

30 October 2016

Politics and Faith

*In the Name of +Jesus. Amen.*

Dear saints,

Given that this Sunday is the last Sunday before most of you will go to the polls and vote, I wanted to spend some time talking with you about this year’s election. And I know some of you are thinking, “Oh boy pastor, Church is the one place I go to get away from election coverage, the 24 hour news cycles, the talking heads talking non-stop about this year’s election, and now you’re talking about it in Church!”

I want to talk about the election from a Christian perspective. Because yes it’s true, people are jaded. It seems were living in a time when trust in our candidates, trust in our government, trust in the media, trust in basically every public institution is at an all-time low. And there’s a lot of anger out there. There’s a lot of anger, there’s a lot of frustration, there’s a lot of outrage. And the temptation is that through this whole process, we lose our love for our neighbor. We get angry with our neighbor, we start to hate our neighbor, and we lose the love God calls us to have toward our neighbor. That’s the temptation.

As Christians, we don’t have to be angry. Christians aren’t an angry people. We’re a joyful people. As Christians, we have a joy that no one can take away from us. We can be joyful no matter what. Whatever happens—this candidate wins, that candidate wins—whatever happens, we’re still joyful.

And why is that? Because Christ is still Lord. Just remember that this November 5th. Christ is still Lord. And this election will not change that. Jesus is still seated at the right hand of the Father. And remember what Jesus said just before his Ascension into heaven, “*All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me*.” [Mt. 28:18] Do you know what that means? It means he’s in control. Jesus is in control.

And that’s important to remember too because, from our vantage point, it seems like the government is in control. But the danger of living with that mindset, that the government is in control, is that we start to think, “Oh, if this person or that person gets control, then all is lost.” And we’re tempted to despair.

But the reality is that standing above all kings and princes and presidents and powers is Jesus. And he is in control. And do you think he’s going to let anything happen to you? You who bear his name? You who are his child by Baptism? Sure, we might suffer the devil to take away plenty of things from us in this life, so that we suffer many things here on earth. But the reality is, the victory that Jesus won for you on Calvary by his suffering and death is a victory that can never be taken away. Nothing will change the fact that your sins have been paid for, that you have been died for by Jesus, that heaven is yours.

Knowing that and believing that, is the secret of living a good news life in a bad news world. It’s the secret of living a joyful life, in the midst of anger and despair. And dear saints, let your neighbors see that joy. When you go to the polls on Tuesday and everybody is angry and frustrated and pushing and shoving, let them see the joy of a Christian on your face.

Let them see that, yes, on Tuesday, you may be going to vote for President, Senator, and whoever else is running. But your trust isn’t in that person. Your trust is in Jesus. You might believe that person has the best plans to fix the country, the best person with solutions to our earthly problems. But ultimately, your trust isn’t in that person, because your trust isn’t in princes.

Like we said together in the Psalm, verse 3, “*Put not your trust in princes, in a son of man, in whom there is no salvation*,” [146:3] but then verse 5,“*blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord his God*.” [v5] Trust not in princes. Trust in God.

And did you see how the hymn of the day reflected that thought? Stanza 2: “Trust not in rulers; they are but mortal; earthborn they are and soon decay. Vain are their counsels at life’s last portal (Do you know what that means? It means, no matter how good our politicians are, they cannot help you in the hour of your death, they cannot save you from your greatest enemy, only God can do that, so trust not in princes), vain are their counsels at life’s last portal, when the dark grave engulfs its prey. Since mortals can no help afford, place all your trust in Christ our Lord, Alleluia, Alleluia. May we all remember this, as we vote in this year’s election.

And so we turn our attention this morning to our readings, which all deal with this intersection between faith and politics. They teach us how we as Christians relate to the governing authorities, and how Christians ought to view the government.

The first thing we learn from the readings is maybe what we learned there in the second reading, from Romans 13 where St. Paul teaches very simply, **all governing authorities have been given to us by God.** This is what he says in verse 1: *Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.* Even though we have this electoral system, this democratic system where we choose our leaders by vote, ultimately it’s God who sets up and takes down our rulers.

And why does God give us rulers? Why does God give us government? It’s really the same reason God gave us parents when we were children. So that our lives would be protected. So that there would be order and not chaos. So that justice may be done—you know, if somebody breaks into your house, it will be the government there, through the police, through the judges, through the courts, to see that justice is done for you. So God gives us the State really the same reason God gave us parents: that we might be cared for, looked after, and protected. St. Paul says, v4, “*he* [your ruler] *is God’s servant for your good*.”

And because of this, because our governing officials are God’s servants for our good, just like our parents, **there are things we owe the government.** Remember what we owe our parents under the fourth commandment? “*Honor your Father and your mother*?” That we honor our parents as God’s authorities? Well there are certain things we owe our government too. Jesus gets at this in the Gospel, when he says, “*Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s and to God, the things that are God’s*.”

What are we called to render unto Caesar? Pay our taxes, vote,

There is a exception. Whenever our