

One of the strongest taboos in our culture is discussing religion or politics. Many people grew up in families where they were told that was impolite. That might explain why the number of people who attend church have plummeted in the past few decades, and why 75 percent of our neighbors do not affiliate with a faith community. If you're not supposed to talk about religion, you're not going to share your experience of God's love very easily. And it may also explain why we've become so badly polarized politically – If you're not supposed to talk about politics, you don't learn how to disagree without being disagreeable.

Yet here we are, at the end of our series on the BE Campaign, and our topic is: Religion and Politics. More precisely, how religion and politics intersect. We will discuss this without condemning or promoting particular candidates. Electioneering has no place in church. But politics? There is no realm of human experience that does not belong in church – emotions, relationships, work, finances, sexuality, politics, you name it. If it's part of life, God wants it part of our faith life. God wants all of us; we don't leave parts of ourselves at home when we come into this building. We don't act out every aspect of our lives, but we bring it all to be looked at in the light of God's love, in repentance if necessary, to have it sanctified for mission. And believe me, where we are politically in this country, we need to bring God's light; we need to exercise our call to be peace-makers. Surveys show that distress about the divisions and tensions in our country is in the top two issues worrying people. God's peacemakers are needed.

Did Jesus avoid politics and focus just on religion? He spoke a lot about God and God's call on us to be just, be kind, be humble; and he functioned within a highly political system. And when faced with a direct question, he did not hesitate to affirm that there is a political realm and a spiritual realm, and we live in both. Two of the groups frequently sparring with Jesus tried to trap him with this "gotcha" question – if he said, "Pay the Roman taxes," he risked sounding like a collaborator with the hated occupation. If he said, "Don't pay the taxes," he could be arrested for resisting Roman rule.

As always, Jesus refused to play their games. He just said,  
“You function in both realms; live in both realms – but don’t confuse the two.”

Politics and religion came together on the cross. It was a combustible combination of the two that resulted in Jesus’ death sentence of at the insistence of the Jewish leaders, and brutal execution at the hands of the Romans. We cannot leave politics at the door when we enter here – it’s right in the middle of the sacred story we tell every single week at that altar.

And politics and religion meet in us, as we function in both realms. How might we bring them into prayerful conversation with each other – and share that conversation with others? Certainly in our prayer lives. Prayer might be the only power we can wield in the political realm. It is limited power, as God has given human beings free will, and God does not change others because we pray. People are free to make choices for good or ill. But if we do what we talked about last week, and pray for blessing for people in the political realm, who knows what might result from such a prayer. As violent rhetoric turns to violent deeds, as we saw on January 6; or this weekend, where even the aged spouses of elected officials can be attacked with hammers by intruders in their homes, we need to pray all the more for the enraged. And we need to pray for the indifferent. Prayer is inviting divine power – the power that made the universe – into this realm. Prayer is power.

So we will be hosting an interfaith prayer service on Election Eve – to invite the community to come into this house of prayer and bring our hearts and minds together. That is an action. It may look quiet, but it’s powerful. Invite people as a sign that politics and religion meet in you.

It doesn’t need to stop with prayer. When people of faith are involved in political systems, as I know many of you are, we have an opportunity to demonstrate our commitment to justice, to model kindness and humility. We have an opportunity to change the narrative, to show a better way, to open hearts slammed shut, to enter into relationships in which transformation can happen – transformation for us, and for others.

Long ago the prophet Isaiah sketched a vision given him by God, a vision of a land where all live in security, without the scourge of racism and prejudice; all have equal access to food and water, safe housing, good work and healthcare.

*They shall build houses and inhabit them;  
they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit.  
No more shall there be in it an infant that lives but a few days,  
or an old person who does not live out a lifetime;  
They shall not labor in vain, or bear children for calamity;  
for they shall be offspring blessed by the Lord— and their descendants as well.*

This new heaven and new earth God is creating already exists in the mind of God,  
In the hearts of those whose faith is strong enough to see it.  
Our political systems are among the ways we bring this vision into reality.  
When religion and politics intersect, it can bring death; or it can bring life.  
When they meet in us, we can bring life.

As the young poet Amanda Gorman proclaimed in her beautiful poem  
at our President's inauguration<sup>1</sup>,  
*And, yes, we are far from polished, far from pristine,  
but that doesn't mean we are striving to form a union that is perfect.  
We are striving to forge our union with purpose/To compose a country committed  
to all cultures, colors, characters and conditions of man.  
And so we lift our gaze, not to what stands between us, but what stands before us.  
We close the divide because we know to put our future first,  
we must first put our differences aside.  
We lay down our arms so we can reach out our arms to one another.  
We seek harm to none and harmony for all.*

*... If we merge mercy with might, and might with right,  
then love becomes our legacy and change our children's birthright.*

*...The new dawn balloons as we free it.  
For there is always light, if only we're brave enough to see it.  
If only we're brave enough to be it.*

Jesus said, "You are light of the world." Be it.  
Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cnn.com/2021/01/20/amanda-gormans-inaugural-poem-the-hill-we-climb-full-text.html>

**Luke 6:27-38**

Then the Pharisees went and plotted to entrap Jesus in what he said. So they sent their disciples to him, along with the Herodians, saying, 'Teacher, we know that you are sincere, and teach the way of God in accordance with truth, and show deference to no one; for you do not regard people with partiality. Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?' But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, 'Why are you putting me to the test, you hypocrites? Show me the coin used for the tax.' And they brought him a denarius. Then he said to them, 'Whose head is this, and whose title?' They answered, 'The emperor's.' Then he said to them, 'Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's.' When they heard this, they were amazed; and they left him and went away.

**Isaiah 25:17-25**

For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth;  
the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind.  
But be glad and rejoice for ever in what I am creating;  
for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy, and its people as a delight.  
I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and delight in my people;  
no more shall the sound of weeping be heard in it, or the cry of distress.  
No more shall there be in it an infant that lives but a few days,  
or an old person who does not live out a lifetime;  
For one who dies at a hundred years will be considered a youth,  
and one who falls short of a hundred will be considered accursed.  
They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit.  
They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat;  
for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be,  
and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands.  
They shall not labor in vain, or bear children for calamity;  
for they shall be offspring blessed by the Lord— and their descendants as well.  
Before they call I will answer, while they are yet speaking I will hear.  
The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox;  
but the serpent—its food shall be dust!  
They shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain, says the Lord.