



Things We Don't Talk About in Church: Politics

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A number of years ago I was invited to preach about death at a church. And I mentioned at the beginning of that sermon that if I had been invited a number of weeks I would have talked about the things we never talk about in church—death, politics, money, sex. A lot of people came up to me at coffee hour and said they wanted to hear the sermon about sex. You'll get to hear that in a couple of weeks.

But today we are going to start with politics, and that seems appropriate given that based on the latest news reports the NH primary's going to take place this Tuesday. But some of you having read your newsletter, having looked at your bulletin, are thinking, "Didn't Steve say that this series had something to do with stewardship?" And you might be wondering, "What is the connection between things we don't talk about in church and stewardship?"

I have said from this pulpit many times and I will continue to say from this pulpit stewardship is not, or at least it should not, be church jargon for the fall fundraising campaign. Stewardship should be what our kids are doing downstairs—giving thanks for the many blessings in our lives, expressing our gratitude to God for all God does for us. And we do that with our money and our skills and our time. We do this by taking care of our community.

Our community is supposed to be representative of God's kingdom. It is a place that is supposed to be healthy and vibrant, one that prospers, and when say prospers I don't mean in a financial sense but one that is strong and vital and growing. And how can we have a strong and vital and growing community if we decide there are going to be topics that we just won't discuss or touch upon. Topics like politics and death and sex and money.

These are all issues that touch each of us and they've touch people throughout the world throughout time and if we as people of faith cannot engage these issues then what really is our faith? Now I have heard some of objections to approaching these topics, particularly the one we are going to discuss today. "These are private matters, or we might start arguing, or what if my position is not the same as the Pastor's. Does that mean that I will receive a lesser quality of care or attention?" Let's address those notions.

Working backwards. I would never, ever, ever decide what kind of pastoral care someone were to get because of the way they voted. I am called to be the pastor of this church—no qualifiers—and my hope is that you as pastors to one another and to me feel the same way. What about the idea that maybe we would disagree or that we might argue.

Does hiding our disagreements go away? Does it make the problems disappear? I don't think so. I think as a community of faith we need to have confidence in one another, to talk to each other, to engage with one another, to tackle issues where there might be different opinions. Who knows, maybe we can learn from one another! Maybe our horizons can be broadened!

And what about this notion that these are private matters? That runs into a slight roadblock. It is sitting in front of you in your pews, this bible, which is filled with stories of faithful people, people like Amos who don't shy away from engaging in the issues of the day. Amos, Josiah, Micah, Izaiah—Jesus, they all speak to political issues. They are motivated by faith to address injustice and corruption. They are willing to speak true to power. They are called by God to do so.

The story that Jesse read a few minutes ago should give us pause, because at first it might seem like it is about a long ago far away confrontation between Amaziah—the court prophet—and Amos, the herdsman.

I am going to guess that nobody in this room have ever met a court profit and the odds are very few of us have met herdsmen or dressers of sycamore trees. But, let's look at these two people a little bit differently and then the story comes into focus for us. Amaziah is on the King's payroll. He is the guy with the legitimacy, the credibility, the degrees, and the certification. He draws his authority from the King. We live in a Republic. You and I are the King. You and I are the sources of authority. Hold that for a moment.

Then think about Amos. Where is Amos drawing his authority from? From God. Now, Amos could have stayed home, he could have worried about his trees, and his animals, but he felt called by God to speak out on behalf of others. He saw things were wrong and he wasn't going to accept that. He felt he knew that Israel was corrupt; Israel was going to collapse, and the fact that there was a covenant was not going to save them.

Now we like to think we are special here in America. But we do not have a covenant with God, and if God was willing to exact judgment on Israel with whom he had a formal covenant, we'd better be careful. I am not going to tell or suggest to anyone how to vote or whom to support but we as a community of faith need to bring our beliefs into the voting booth. We need to bring them into our political involvement. We need to be engaged. We cannot as Christians say that we are going to judge issues by tax policy, or immigration, or national policy, based on our bank accounts or what makes safe alone.

If we are followers of Jesus Christ then the first and foremost thing that needs to be drawing our evaluations of these issues is what we have been told in scripture, and there is a lot of talk about particular issues and people in scripture. A lot of time and attention is given to the poor, and the oppressed, and the widows, to the stranger, to officials doing the right thing. If we feel that our government, whether run by Republicans or Democrats, is going off the rails, we can't blame it on lobbyists or politicians. We need to speak up and get involved. We need to vote; we need to encourage others to vote.

We have two flags at the front of our sanctuary—our American flag, and our interdenominational church flag. Neither of these can though can be the focus of our ultimate allegiance. Neither the state nor the institutional church. As Christians, the thing that ultimately lays claim to us is what is represented by the cross. Our risen Lord.

Sometimes that can make being a citizen difficult. It can be easier to go along and get along, yet when we do that, when we turn a blind eye then we are complicit. So we need to speak out and talk about issues with one another and as a community. We need as Christians to be prepared to speak up about where our tax dollars are going and how they are being used. We need to be prepared to hold our elected officials to account. We need to do it on a national level, on a state level, and on the local level.

I hope that we can begin to engage in discussion around these issues, that we have enough confidence in each other to trust each other that we'll listen and not fight, but try to understand where people are coming from, that we will believe in the strength in our community, and know, that we are a people called to witness to the love and grace and justice that we know in and through our God.