

Jesus For President
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(Luke 4:16-21 NRSV) When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, {17} and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: {18} "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, {19} to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." {20} And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. {21} Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

I actually did something that I have never done before. I sat down and read the platforms of the two major parties in the United States for this presidential election. I don't know if any of you have ever done that — to be honest I never have — but since I do not vote for parties — but vote for candidates — it seemed to make sense to get behind all of the rhetoric and see what was actually there.

But it also got me thinking — what kind of platform would Jesus have?
Have you ever thought about that?
Seriously — what issues would make it on a platform for Jesus?

A book published earlier this year really sparked my interest — It is written by Shane Claiborne and Chris Haw and titled quite simply: *Jesus for President*.

In the introduction, they made this comment that really resonated with me:
Having power at its fingertips, the church often finds "guiding the course of history" a more alluring goal than following the crucified Christ. Too often the patriotic values of pride and strength triumph over the spiritual values of humility, gentleness, and sacrificial love. . . . we want to be good Christians, but deep down we trust that only the power of the state and its militaries and markets can really make a difference in the world. (p.19-20)

If we read the Biblical story carefully we find that God does not want us to have a king — instead God wants to be our king.

The story of the Exodus, however is all about how the people want to return to the perceived safety of Pharaoh, rather than putting all of their trust in God.

Remember, this is the God who would rather camp out in the wilderness with these refugee people rather than be shut up in a palace or megachurch or even the oval office.

The Bible tells us that “God does not dwell I temples built by hands” but we in our hunger for power insist that God should.

The story tells us that God gave in to our demands for a ruler — so that we could be like the nations.

And God reminds us of what kings do:

make us into their slaves and soldiers —> so that we can serve in their palaces and their wars.

Kings make us compromise the very identity of God

How can we be “set apart” or “peculiar” if we look like the rest of the world?

When Jesus enters into the world — the stories make it very clear that Jesus is not the same kind of King that the world was looking for.

Claiborne writes:

Some of us may remember a Sunday school tune: “His banner over me, his banner over you, is love, love, love.” This is another way of saying his banner means “love, love, love”: not Rome’s freedom, peace and security.” We wave the banner for Jesus and not for Rome, the United States of America, or any other nation or empire that vies for our allegiance.

What Claiborne is trying to remind us is that we must be CHRISTIANS first, and that our FIRST allegiance must be to God and not our nation.

I am convinced that what Jesus wants if for his followers (you and me) to be unique, peculiar, and set-apart people.

Jesus doesn’t want the government to be more religious — he wants us to abandon the world and to cultivate an alternative society. Not a better version — but the kingdom of God in which GOD is truly king!

So what kind of platform would Jesus have?

It is hard to imagine Jesus wearing a “God Bless Rome” T-shirt and promoting his campaign with stickers and buttons. Let alone a billion dollars in campaign spending.

I would think that he would find himself rather uncomfortable as commander in chief of the largest military in the world.

When Jesus emerges on the scene he gives his opening campaign speech.

He delivered it in his hometown of Nazareth — at the local synagogue even.

Luke records it this way:

He came to Nazareth where he had been reared. As he always did on the Sabbath, he went to the meeting place. When he stood up to read, he was handed the scroll of the prophet Isaiah. Unrolling the scroll, he found the place where it was written,

God's Spirit is on me;
 he's chosen me to preach the Message of good news to
 the poor,

Sent me to announce pardon to prisoners and
 recovery of sight to the blind,

To set the burdened and battered free,
 to announce, "This is God's year to act!"

He rolled up the scroll, handed it back to the assistant, and sat down. Every eye in the place was on him, intent. Then he started in, "You've just heard Scripture make history. It came true just now in this place."

Did you hear what he was saying when he read from Isaiah?

What he said is JUBILEE!

That they way out of Rome's grip — out of the economic crisis that they were facing — out of the military machine that controlled their lives — lay not in trying to appeal to Rome or even in trying to overthrow Rome. No, the only way out was in proclaiming God's alternative economy — and not just proclaiming it — but actually living it right under Rome's nose.

What Jesus had in mind was people coming together and forming close-knit communities in which they meet each others needs. No kings. No welfare systems. No presidents.

And as the people of Nazareth heard this they got excited!

But then he went on and reminded the people of Israel that the plan wasn't for them to be God's favorites, or more blessed than others. Instead, they were to be a blessing for the whole world.

And if you are familiar with the story — you know what happens next.

While the speech in Nazareth may have kicked off his campaign — when we listen to the sermon that he gave on that hillside overlooking the Sea of Galilee we find his platform. It is a long three chapter platform found in Matthew chapters 5-7.

I want to share just a little with you.

"You're blessed when you're at the end of your rope. With less of you there is more of God and his rule.

"You're blessed when you feel you've lost what is most dear to you. Only then can you be embraced by the One most dear to you.

"You're blessed when you're content with just who you are—no more, no less. ~~That's the moment you find yourselves proud owners of everything that can't be bought.~~

"You're blessed when you've worked up a good appetite for God. ~~He's food and drink in the best meal you'll ever eat.~~

"You're blessed when you care. ~~At the moment of being 'care-full,' you find yourselves cared for.~~

~~"You're blessed when you get your inside world—your mind and heart—put right. Then you can see God in the outside world.~~

"You're blessed when you can show people how to cooperate instead of compete or fight. That's when you discover who you really are, and your place in God's family.

"You're blessed when your commitment to God provokes persecution. The persecution drives you even deeper into God's kingdom.

"Not only that—count yourselves blessed every time people put you down or throw you out or speak lies about you to discredit me. What it means is that the truth is too close for comfort and they are uncomfortable. ~~You can be glad when that happens—give a cheer, even!—for though they don't like it, I do! And all heaven applauds. And~~

~~know that you are in good company. My prophets and witnesses have always gotten into this kind of trouble.~~

"Don't suppose for a minute that I have come to demolish the Scriptures— either God's Law or the Prophets. I'm not here to demolish but to complete. I am going to put it all together, pull it all together in a vast panorama. God's Law is more real and lasting than the stars in the sky and the ground at your feet. Long after stars burn out and earth wears out, God's Law will be alive and working.

"Trivialize even the smallest item in God's Law and you will only have trivialized yourself. But take it seriously, show the way for others, and you will find honor in the kingdom. Unless you do far better than the Pharisees in the matters of right living, you won't know the first thing about entering the kingdom.

~~"And don't say anything you don't mean. This counsel is embedded deep in our traditions. You only make things worse when you lay down a smoke screen of pious talk, saying, 'I'll pray for you,' and never doing it, or saying, 'God be with you,' and not meaning it. You don't make your words true by embellishing them with religious lace. In making your speech sound more religious, it becomes less true. Just say 'yes' and 'no.' When you manipulate words to get your own way, you go wrong.~~

"Here's another old saying that deserves a second look: 'Eye for eye, tooth for tooth.' Is that going to get us anywhere? Here's what I propose: 'Don't hit back at all.' If someone strikes you, stand there and take it. If someone drags you into court and sues for the shirt off your back, giftwrap your best coat and make a present of it. And if someone takes unfair advantage of you, use the occasion to practice the servant life. No more tit-for-tat stuff. Live generously.

"You're familiar with the old written law, 'Love your friend,' and its unwritten companion, 'Hate your enemy.' I'm challenging that. I'm telling you to love your enemies. Let them bring out the best in you, not the worst. When someone gives you a hard time, respond with the energies of prayer, for then you are working out of your true selves, your God-created selves. This is what God does. He gives his best—the sun to warm and the rain to nourish—to everyone, regardless: the good and bad, the nice and nasty. ~~If all you do is love the lovable, do you expect a bonus? Anybody can do that. If you simply say hello to those who greet you, do you expect a medal? Any run-of-the-mill sinner does~~

~~that.~~

~~"In a word, what I'm saying is, Grow up. You're kingdom subjects. Now live like it. Live out your God-created identity. Live generously and graciously toward others, the way God lives toward you."~~

Every time I read those I think — “You’ve got to be kidding . . . Who is going to follow all that.”

But that is the platform — or just some of the platform that Jesus offers to us.

I asked the class on Wednesday night to list some of the things they thought would be a part of Jesus platform

This is what they said:

He would run a clean campaign

Seek world peace through cultural awareness, education and making sure that everyone’s needs are met.

Everyone would be able to receive education — and the quality would not depend on where you lived

Healthcare for everyone

Equal opportunities for all regardless of race, sex or creed

Big business would be regulated

Woody Guthrie once sang: “If Jesus preached in New York what he preached in Galilee, we’d lay him in his grave again.”

On Tuesday, I want to encourage you to go to the polls and vote. And as you push that button — sometimes blindly because we have always voted Republican or Democratic — I want you to stop — slow down — maybe even say a little prayer — that the people you are voting for will exemplify the platform of Jesus. A platform of love and justice.

Henri Nouwen once wrote:

You are a Christian only so long as you constantly pose critical questions to the society you live in ... so long as you stay unsatisfied with the status quo and keep saying that a new world is yet to come.

I want to close with one final thought.

I don't know about you, but my e-mail box has been filled these last two years with all kinds of forwards about the two candidates.

Adam Hamilton put on his blogs the words that I have been feeling when he writes:

One of the recent e-mail I received was sent to a long list of people and in it was another "fact" which, after doing a bit of checking, appears to be untrue. One of the folks who received this e-mail hit, "reply all" and wrote in frustration, "Why don't you guys check your facts before you send out this ****. I'm voting for the candidate you are supporting, but I get so irritated when I keep seeing this false info. In the military I learned about ethical matters and truth. What has happened to us, that we want to win so bad that we keep spreading rumors? If your going to keep sending out this **** please take me off your mailing list!!!"

Here was a man who may or may not be a Christian, who had learned in the army that the kind of behavior his Christian friend was exhibiting was unethical. And these two men were of the same party, voting for the same candidate.

Regardless of which candidate we support, as Christians we should be held to a higher standard of truth telling than others. So, let's debate the issues. Let's raise concerns about whether we feel someone has the experience or the skills or the proper perspective on issues, but let's make sure that we've checked our facts before passing on loaded e-mail and let's be above reproach in the comments we share about either candidate.

Jesus for President!

That is somebody I could put my support behind — but I also know that we would never elect him because what he wants of us is too much