

July 9
God's Politic's (part 4)
The Secret Message of Jesus
Steven M Conger

(Deuteronomy 30:19-20 NRSV) I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, loving the LORD your God, obeying him, and holding fast to him; for that means life to you and length of days, so that you may live in the land that the LORD swore to give to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.

As we began this series four weeks ago, I wondered what kind of response we would get. Whenever we try to talk about God and politics it is sure to stir up something? Isn't it?

Apart from some of you coming up and telling me thank you for attempting to tackle this touchy subject — and one anonymous letter (that I have no idea what it said – because I do not read anonymous letters). I haven't heard a peep?

And that makes me wonder? Did we miss the mark? Or maybe the subject matter is so difficult that everything we talked about went in one ear and out the other?

Before we wrap this up this morning – I want to remind you about next week.

- ! one service at 10:00
- ! reception (continental breakfast starting at 9:30)
- ! My family and I will leave immediately following the service

I hope that you will come and share with us in the exciting day.

Back to God and politics.

I hope that you have come to realize that we cannot — nor should we separate God from our political process.

I began this series by giving you four points:

GOD IS NOT PARTISAN

VALUES MATTER

ONLY THE PEOPLE OF FAITH CAN CHANGE THE WAY THE WIND IS BLOWING IN AMERICA TO HELP ALL PEOPLE HEAR THE PROPHETIC CALL OF THE BIBLE.

GOD IS PERSONAL, BUT NEVER PRIVATE

Yet at the same time, I hope that we also have seen how important it is to make sure that we are following God's agenda and not our own.

I know that is a hard one.

It is very hard at times to separate our desires from God's desire.

Jeff then reminded us that complaining isn't the solution — changing is.

And the result from that sermon has been amazing

Shift to Fair Trade Coffee

Recycle at our 3rd of July festival

Recycle for the community at the Jazz and Blues Festival

A new awareness of how interconnected we are

Then we got personal

Two weeks ago I asked a profound question: Does God drop bombs? Can we as Christians really live with a theory that says some wars are "Just"? Or should we as Christians be the ones who offer another way?

Last week Jeff challenged our conventional wisdom about wealth — reminding us that as Christians we are to seek to eliminate poverty and hunger from our world — that we are not to try and hoard it all for ourselves.

Every now and then — I pick up something that is so profound it makes me look in a new direction.

In the midst of preparing for this series, I picked up a book by Brian McLaren. Now I have to confess something here: A year ago, Bishop Mike asked all of the clergy to read a book by this same author called *A Generous Orthodoxy*. Being a good company man – I bought a copy and began to read.

I HATED IT

To use a phrase made popular by the republican party during Bill Clinton's presidency — he seemed to waffle — about everything.

I read about a third and put it down.

Then a few months ago I saw a copy of Brian McLaren's new book: *The Secret Message of Jesus*, I looked at it and it looked interesting. So I bought it. It sat

on my To Be Read shelf for a long time until the other day when I picked it up and began to read — I couldn't put it down.

I challenge you to pick it up and read it for yourself. I would leave my copy here, but I am going to take it with me and read it again.

What Brian McLaren does is he links the reality of all of life — to the practice of being a Christian.

In other words — our actions:
 from our shopping choices
 our voting choices
 our everyday choices
 all have religious implications

Brian McLaren addressed everything that Jeff and I have tried to say, but says it so much better than I ever could.

So how do we conclude this series?

Jeff said last week that he always asks himself — What's the good news?

The good news is — we can change the world
 we can break the cycle of poverty
 we can end injustice
 we can overcome our racism, our greed, our desire to put our own agenda ahead of God's

The question is: ARE WE WILLING?

Are we willing to be inconvenienced for the sake of God's children?
 Are we willing to use our resources for the sake of God's children?
 Are we willing to sacrifice for the sake of God's children?

In God's Politics, Jim Wallis tells the story of a good friend of his Chuck Matthei. Chuck he says embodied the spirit that we are talking about — working to bring justice to the world.

Chuck developed terminal cancer, but before he died he shared some life lessons with Jim Wallis. Jim promised him he would share them, and he did for the first time at Chuck's funeral.

Chuck Matthei's Life Lessons

1. CHOICE You can always make a choice. No matter what is done to you,

no matter what people think, you have choices. Illness is like being in jail. You can think about what you've lost — but you'll go crazy. Or you can say, Here I am, what do I do? There is never a time when you cannot make a meaningful decision. You can choose to be grateful.

Last Wednesday I was invited to speak at Wounded Healers, Pat Kish's wonderful group for people who are grieving a loss. I said the same thing — you can focus on what is lost — or you can be grateful for the gift you had.

2. INTEGRITY/DIGNITY There is the "soul" or, as the Quakers say, "that of God in every person." This is key. Bernadette Devlin once said, "To keep your dignity, you may have to give up everything else." Integrity is who you are when your eyes are wide open. It is to make the best and most thoughtful choices. They can't take your dignity away from you. They can make you pay a price for it, but they can't take it away. My advice is to maintain an identity and dignity that are profound, while humble. The first two lessons represent opportunities — choice and integrity/dignity. The third is an obligation.
3. OPEN YOUR EYES. Augustine said, "Love God, and do as you please." He did not say, "Do as you please." Look around you. Who do you see? I would say, "Open your eyes, then do as you please." Find God in the other, in what Christians call "the least of these." Decide what you want with your eyes wide open — depending on who is at the table. See what's there. Put yourself in context. Walk across the street. See who is around. See as much as you can see. Then make a decision.
4. RELATIONSHIPS If you exercise your ability to choose, maintain your integrity, look at the other and include them in your field of vision, then you will see the web of relationships with others and the whole creation. Then you will value a spirit of welcome and the practice of compassion.

The choice is ours.

If we don't step up to the plate — who is going to?

We claim the name of Jesus Christ — in his name, for his sake, we must seek to change the world!

Let me close with a powerful poem — or maybe it is a prayer, written by Archbishop Oscar Romero. You may remember Archbishop Romero, he was gunned down in 1980 as he sought to bring God's justice to the people of El Salvador.

A future not our own

It helps, now and then, to step back
and take the long view.
The kingdom is not only beyond our efforts,
it is beyond our vision.

We accomplish in our lifetime only a tiny fraction of
the magnificent enterprise that is God's work.
Nothing we do is complete,
which is another way of saying
that the kingdom always lies beyond us.

No statement says all that could be said.
No prayer fully expresses our faith.
No confession brings perfection.
No pastoral visit brings wholeness.
No program accomplishes the church's mission.
No set of goals and objectives includes everything.

This is what we are about:
We plant seeds that one day will grow.
We water seeds already planted, knowing that they hold future promise.
We lay foundations that will need further development.
We provide yeast that produces effects beyond our capabilities.

We cannot do everything
and there is a sense of liberation in realizing that.
This enables us to do something,
and to do it very well.
It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way,
an opportunity for God's grace to enter and do the rest.

We may never see the end results,
but that is the difference between the master builder and the worker.
We are workers, not master builders,
ministers, not messiahs.
We are prophets of a future not our own