

Mark 12:28-34  
Psalm 146  
31<sup>st</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

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(A disclaimer: This sermon was written to be spoken, which does not always translate into correct grammatical form for a document written to be read.)

### Voting God's Politics

I'm Ann Deibert and I approve this message.

Aren't you so ready for it to be Wednesday—the day after the elections? I was ready for it all to be over about two weeks ago when I saw yet one more mud-slinging, context-distorting, half-truth-creating, issue-evading political ad on tv. (Can I get an amen?)

I don't have enough money to run a television ad but I do have the pulpit and since we still have two more days until V-Day (that's voting day), I'm going to tell you how to vote God's politics.

Okay, that's probably a little presumptuous and audacious on my part. For really, how can know the mind of God? And who am I to tell you just how God would vote?

But the truth is, we can know the mind of God and even the heart of God. One way, of course, is by reading the Bible. It doesn't give us a lock on God as if we could say, "God? Oh yeah, I've got God down." But we get some pretty big clues about God's priorities and God's concerns.

Jesus sums it up when he's asked by one of the religious teachers, "which of the commandments is the greatest?" And doesn't that sound like someone looking for some wiggle room? "Okay, God gave us ten commandments...but really, tell me what one thing I need to do to stay on God's good side."

And don't you think Jesus gave him the eye? Well, really, Jesus probably looked on him with love and said, "The most important way to live is to love God with your whole self, and to love other people as you love yourself." And then maybe he thought for a minute... "Yeah, that covers it."

When I used to vote as a resident of Washington State, I'd go into the voting booth, pull a lever and the dark curtain would swish closed behind me—which is so much more dramatic than standing at a 3-sided plastic desk like we do in Kentucky.

No matter what the voting location looks like, sometimes it's easy for us to think our vote is just about which candidate we like the best or which candidate is going to do right by us. (Although these days—they'll only do right by you if you're a donor with \$10,000 to share.)

As people who are following Jesus on the way, we take the greatest commandment into the voting booth with us. The command to love God and love other people.

Let me clarify: sometimes we think loving other people is about being nice to them. And that's not a bad thing—to be nice to other people. But when Jesus said "love your neighbor as yourself" he meant something far more radical than that. He was drawing on what he studied in Sabbath School from the book of Leviticus where "'loveing your neighbor' was... shorthand for Israel not exploiting the less powerful and the stranger in its midst (Lev. 19.9-18). It meant that Israelites were to leave crops in the field for the poor and the sojourner[. They] were not to enact

laws that afforded political sanction to steal from those powerless to resist[. They...] were not to slander those whose property could be obtained by abusing positions of privilege.”<sup>1</sup> That sounds, to me, a whole lot more political than just being nice to people.

This past Thursday the *New York Times* reported that under a new federal policy, children born in the United States to low income illegal immigrants will no longer be automatically entitled to health insurance through Medicaid.<sup>2</sup> Now whether they have health insurance or not, the reality is babies have health care needs from the day of their birth. Without health insurance, it is expected that many babies of illegal immigrants (babies who, by their birth, are U.S. citizens) will not get the proper immunizations and preventative health care they need.

If Jesus’ direction about loving other people has to do with not exploiting the less powerful and the stranger in our midst, how do we think about such a policy that negatively affects the well-being of babies born in our country? Which candidates will receive our vote when we know God’s politics include protecting the powerless and the stranger?

Bread for the World is a faith-based organization working to eliminate hunger in the U.S. and around the world. There are 300 million people in the US. Bread for the World, a faith-based organization working to eliminate hunger in the U.S. and around the world, reports that out of the 300 million people in our country over 38 million, including nearly 14 million children, “live in households that experience hunger or the risk of hunger.” This is more than one in ten people in the United States. Look around you in this sanctuary and picture every tenth person—that is the face of hunger in this country.

People in households that experience hunger frequently skip meals or eat too little, sometimes going without food for a whole day. And this is not because they are dieting or too busy to eat. It is because they cannot afford adequate food. “Research shows that preschool and school-aged children who experience severe hunger have higher levels of chronic illness, anxiety and depression, and behavior problems than children with no hunger.”<sup>3</sup>

If Jesus’ direction about loving other people has to do with leaving crops in the field to provide food for the poor and the sojourner, how do we think about the face of hunger in our sisters and brothers? Which candidates will receive our vote when we know God’s politics include providing food for those who are hungry?

Okay, I know, it’s hard to find candidates of either party in Frankfort or Washington whose politics are similar to, much less align with, God’s politics. Even if they head into office with those aspirations, there is an awful lot of compromising and corruption that takes place on both sides of the aisle as soon as they get there.

Psalm 146 reminds us not to trust in princes or presidents...well, okay, I added the presidents part...but I think the psalm writer would allow that poetic license. Instead, we are to trust in God—and just in case we’re not sure which god the psalmist is talking about, God’s characteristics are laid out. The God in whom we trust is the creator of all that is, the One who is steadfast in love; who carries out justice for the oppressed, who feeds the hungry, who sets the prisoners free, opens the eyes of the blind, lifts up those who are bowed down, watches over the

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<sup>1</sup> Brian K. Blount and Gary W. Charles, *Preaching Mark in Two Voices*, Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002, p197.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/11/03/washington/03medicaid.html?hp&ex=1162530000&en=d6e5a44640aac26d&ei=5094&partner=homepage>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.bread.org/learn/hunger-basics/hunger-facts-domestic.html>

strangers, the orphans and the widows. These are God's priorities and concerns. These are God's politics.

Just in case this makes you despair about what to do, let me remind you: not being able to find the ideal candidate and not trusting in princes and presidents doesn't relieve us of our responsibility to do something—and that includes voting. (I suppose you've heard that's coming up on Tuesday?)

The Talmud says,

Do not be daunted by the enormity of the world's grief.

Do justly, now. Love mercy, now. Walk humbly, now.

You are not obligated to complete the work,  
but neither are you free to abandon it.

When we pick up the stubby pencil to completely darken the little circles on our ballot, we do so as followers of Jesus on the way—the way of loving God and loving others by doing justice, loving mercy, walking humbly with God.

Before we go to the polls, we gather around this table. The table of Jesus who was so thoroughly imbued with loving God and loving others that the powers of death and destruction killed him—tried to stamp out that radical message—tried to turn religion into just being nice. But the power of God continued to live in those who had walked with Jesus and it began to spread to others. And for generations, people who followed Jesus on the way have gathered around tables to share bread and wine—to give thanks for the life of Jesus and to look forward to the time of God's great banquet feast when there will be food enough for everyone, room enough at the table for everyone, and the deep peace of shalom for everyone.

We come to this table. We give thanks. We look forward. And we receive sustenance and strength to be part of God's politics in the world.