

Third Sunday of Lent

Lectionary B

Trinity Church, March 4, 2018

It is common these days for the name of Jesus to be included in political conversations. I guess if you have Jesus on your side you don't have to worry about anything anyone else says. If they disagree with you, they are obviously wrong. I don't do Facebook, but Jim shows me political controversies flaming on the internet and seen by thousands of people. In some of these embattlements God as understood

in Jesus is used as a battering ram to knock down the credibility of opponents. The biggest fallacy in these arguments is that the contestants professing to be Christians don't know who Jesus is. Will the real Jesus please stand up! What, for example, does the Bible actually say about Jesus?

Without attempting to give a biography of Jesus, our lessons this morning tell us some things about him. For example, he was a Jew and worshipped in the synagogue and temple. He supported the Ten Commandments given by God to Moses. He particularly advocated

the summary of the law which is to love God and our neighbors as ourselves. (Matthew 22:37-40)

He also said, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill.” (Matt. 5:17)

Controversies sometimes erupt in our communities regarding the placement of the Ten

Commandments in public places.

Keeping the commandments is also of public concern, such as “You shall not murder.” Murders are all too frequent in our society, including the devastating shootings in our schools; and our country

spends billions on military defense to keep us safe from our enemies. Designed for prevention of an attack, armaments can also be used to retaliate -- to obliterate, if necessary, those who would harm us or threaten our allies. Rather than physical murder in politics the prevalent method is character assassination. The victim lives but is personally and professionally destroyed. How well do we keep the commandment?

Paul gives us other ideas of who Jesus was. He writes regarding wisdom that "Jews demand signs and Greeks desire

wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength." (1 Cor. 1:18-25)

Jesus would never have been a successful candidate for President. Imagine telling people to love their enemies and to pray for those who persecute us. (Matt. 5:38-48) He didn't approve of the primitive principle of "an eye for

an eye and a tooth for a tooth”
found in Exodus (21:23-24),
Leviticus (24:19-20) and
Deuteronomy (19:21). Instead of
retaliation he advocated passive
resistance with prayer for those
who hurt us. For the sake of love
he was willing to die on a cross as
a failed leader. His example,
however, has made him the
greatest champion of peace in
history.

If anyone wants Jesus to be
on their side to promote military
defense, for example, tell them to
choose someone else. And be
careful when you hear people

using Jesus' name or God's name to validate their political opinions. "God, guns, guts," the message on a T-shirt worn by a nice young man at the YMCA, is not going to fair well if Jesus is called upon to defend the guns. The god of guns is more appropriately ascribed to Mars rather than to the God of peace.

Moving to John's Gospel we see that Jesus wasn't a timid soul. John says that Jesus made a whip of cords to drive the money changers and their market goods out of the temple saying, "Take these things out of here! Stop

making my Father's house a marketplace!" This story in Matthew, Mark, and Luke includes the adage, "My house shall be a house of prayer; but you have made it a den of robbers." (Luke 19:45) Only John mentions the use of a whip. Some scholars think that the whip was an addition by John whose Gospel was written last. Chances are that it was the forcefulness of Jesus' authority regarding this issue that cleansed the temple. Had he used a whip he would have been tackled and taken down. In either case, Jesus demanded that God's place of

worship be honored. In modern times we might say that the stock market has replaced churches, synagogues, and mosques as the contemporary place of worship. Becoming a billionaire is not the model of a fine vocation, however. Worshiping the Source of our being and serving the needs of others is.

From what we know of Jesus in the Bible he was more of a socialist than a capitalist. He wouldn't do well with Republicans or Democrats. He cared for the welfare of all people not the accumulation of wealth for the

wealthy at the expense of the poor.
Jesus could probably work with
Bernie Sanders, but he'd get into
trouble with Congress as they fuss
about who gets health care and
who doesn't.

If we understand that Jesus
was for peace and justice,
forgiveness for our sins, and
ultimate devotion to God, then we
can quote him. Being an immigrant
himself as a baby in the story of
the flight into Egypt to escape
Herod's wrath, Jesus would be a
poor choice as one in charge of
deportations. If one wants to use
Jesus' attitudes as evidence to

condemn people who commit sexual sins, remember that he forgave the woman taken in adultery; and those who wanted to stone her to death left the scene one by one. (John 8:1-11) As another example, in the history of the Civil War in this country one can read the prayers of soldiers on the north and the south. Whose side was God on? God, of course, is on everyone's side; and how inappropriate it is to claim that "Jesus loves me, but he can't stand you."

Enough rummaging in Facebook feuds. Unfriending

seems to be an easier solution
rather than extending the fight. But
if you like sandbox flurries, be
careful how you use the name of
Jesus to win an argument.