

Should We All Think Alike?

1. Warm-up question: What is your favorite fast food restaurant and why?
2. Just last week, Chick-fa-lay became the target of a far-right boycott because they say Chick-fa-lay has “gone woke.” A few years ago, many of us began avoiding Chick-fa-lay because of its anti-gay stance. Recently, however Chick-fa-lay has adopted a “policy of belonging” that requires all franchises to be welcoming and inclusive of all employees and customers, including LGBTQ people. Target is now also now caught up in protests and counter-protests. How do you feel about the current state of American politics? Do you think it’s worse now than at other times in our history?
3. Although many of us are disenchanted with the current state of American politics, politics is too important to withdraw. Public policy shapes the culture in which we live. Bad policies can harm many; good policies can give life to many. If people matter, politics matters. So on Sunday we began a sermon series called, “The Bible & Justice: What Love Looks Like in Pubic.” Jeff said the goal of this new series is not for him to tell everyone what our detailed political policy positions should be, but rather to identify core biblical values relevant to contemporary justice issues and then challenge each of us, as individuals, to prayerfully develop positions that we believe are consistent with those biblical values. How do you feel about that approach? Is it a wimp-out or a good way to go? Have you ever been in a church where there was only one acceptable political perspective? How did that feel?
4. Jesus lived in a time of very turbulent politics. The Romans invaded Israel in 67 BC, fought for 30 years, and finally eradicated the Jewish resistance in 37 BC, after killing 150,000 Jews. The defining political issue in first century Jewish culture was how to respond to the Roman occupation. To help us better understand the various political factions in Jesus’ culture, Jeff walked us through a thought experiment. Read the thought experiment printed on p. 3, then answer the questions found there.
5. Jesus’ inner circle, listed in our Scripture passage, was an amazing cross-section of the full range of Jewish politics at the time. Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot (dagger man) were both Zealots, favoring armed resistance. Joanna and Matthew were both associated with the Sadducee perspective, favoring collaboration. The fishermen (Peter, Andrew, James, and John) likely associated with the Pharisee’s political perspective, an approach that blended elements of resistance and collaboration. So when the disciples gathered around Jesus table, there were leftwing Zealots, rightwing Sadducees, and moderate Pharisees, politically speaking.
 - a. Assign these three roles to three people in your group and have them to role play a brief political argument in which they debate the best approach.
 - b. The cultural and political diversity of Jesus’ original disciples was replicated in the earliest churches. Galatians 3:28 says that in Christ “there is no longer Jew or

Greek, slave or free, male and female.” What does that tell us about the diversity and composition of many of the earliest churches?

- c. The cultural and political diversity of Jesus original disciples will also be replicated in heaven, where we’re told there will be people “from every nation [and] all tribes and peoples and languages.” Revelation 7:9. Jeff joking said, “You know what that means, don’t you? That means there will be Republicans in heaven! There will be Democrats in heaven! There will even be Independents in heaven!” Seriously, though, does that feel like heaven to you? Suppose you end up in a heavenly compound sharing the same courtyard with someone of your opposite political persuasion. How will that feel?
 - d. Why do you think Jesus chose to call such a politically diverse group of disciples?
6. Clearly, diversity is a high value for followers of Jesus, but so is justice, and it often feels like there’s a tension between the two. How can we be a church that highly values both? Jeff pointed out that, although diverse people were called into Jesus’ inner circle, there were certain nonnegotiable core values they all had to embrace, such as the presence of empowered women, so that there was a certain unity in their diversity. Maybe that points us to a way justice and diversity can be reconciled. There are certain core biblical justice values we should all embrace. But there can (and probably should) be good faith debate and difference about what specific policies will best promote those core justice values.
- a. For an example of how this might work in action, look at the graph on p. 4. With any given justice issue, there might be multiple different policies that could potentially further justice in that area. When a supermajority of our congregation agrees on a specific policy action, we can advocate for that policy as a church, and those opposed can conscientiously disagree as individuals. Conversely, where there’s no substantial consensus for a policy, our church shouldn’t take a collective position, but all of us as individuals are still free to take individual positions. That’s what Jeff was suggesting. Critique that model. How does it feel? Is it the right way to balance love for justice and respect for diversity?
 - b. It’s hard to engage in patient dialogue on vital political issues with people who disagree with us. Why is that so hard? Is it worth the effort? What’s the best way to conduct ourselves in those conversations?
 - c. Being diverse means that there will be some political policies we can’t agree on as a church family. When that happens, each of us has a choice: embrace the give-and-take that comes with diversity or seek out a more homogenous church where there isn’t political diversity. Which would you prefer – and why?
 - d. Jeff said that diversity itself is a justice issue. What do you think he meant? Do you agree or disagree?
 - e. In the final analysis, do you think it’s possible to be both a beautifully diverse church and also a robust justice-seeking church? Explain your answer.

Thought Experiment: The Politics of Occupation

Imagine tomorrow an armada of UFOs landed in America and aliens forcibly impose their rule over us. Which of the following political strategies would you be most likely to adopt?

- Option 1 Withdraw and form small communes in remote areas where you will be free to live without interference from the aliens.
- Option 2 Vigorously confront and fight the aliens. Stand on principle!
- Option 3 Befriend the aliens, and compromise with them to preserve good will and a measure of autonomy. Be pragmatic so as to survive.
- Option 4 Merge Options 2 & 3 together, creating hybrid blend principle and pragmatism, confronting the aliens in certain areas while compromising with them in others, as necessary.

- ✓ Which option would you most likely choose and why?
- ✓ Jesus and his people were living this thought experiment, and developed political movements that mirrored the foregoing options. Option 1 corresponds to a movement called the Essenes. Option 2 corresponds to the Zealots. Option 3 to the Sadducees. And Option 4 to the political approach of the Pharisees. So if you were alive in Jesus' day, you would have been labeled as leaning toward which of the foregoing movements?
- ✓ Read our Scripture passage below, then return to the questions on p. 1.

Luke 6:12-16 and 8:1-3

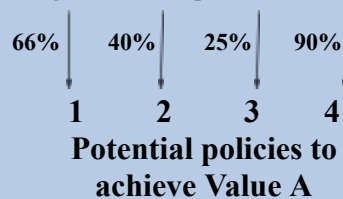
Now during those days he went out to the mountain to pray; and he spent the night in prayer to God. ¹³And when day came, he called his disciples and chose twelve of them, whom he also named apostles: ¹⁴Simon, whom he named Peter, and his brother Andrew, and James, and John, and Philip, and Bartholomew, ¹⁵and Matthew, and Thomas, and James son of Alphaeus, and Simon, who was called the Zealot, ¹⁶and Judas son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor.

8 Soon afterwards he went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. The twelve were with him, ²as well as some women who had been cured

of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out,³ and Joanna, the wife of Herod's steward Chuza, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their resources.

How to Value Both Justice and Diversity Example of a Possible Model

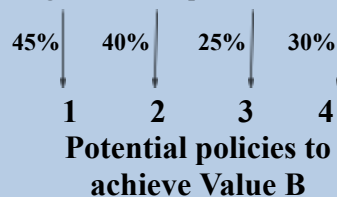
Core Biblical Justice Value A (Nonnegotiable to be part of the community)



Result:

Congregation advocates policies 1 and 4, but not 2 and 3.
But individuals are free to advocate or not as they wish.

Core Biblical Justice Value B (Nonnegotiable to be part of the community)



Result:

Congregation does not advocate specific policies.
But individuals are free to advocate as they wish.