

Unsettling Times

On Sunday, we talked about what happened in last week's election, exploring spiritual principles that can anchor and guide our response.

1. Warm up question: Who has been your favorite President during your lifetime?
2. Jeff told a story about a friendly political gag his Dad pulled on a neighbor back in 1964 when Johnson ran against Goldwater. His Dad put a "Vote LBJ!" sign in his neighbor's yard, knowing his neighbor was a died-in-the-wool Republican. Everyone had a good laugh. If something like that happened today, Jeff suggested, it would be perceived as a very hostile act.
 - a. Do you think politics are more polarized now than they used to be? If so, why? What's increasing the polarization?
 - b. Jeff said, "This election felt different." Do you agree? What was different?
3. Jesus' inner circle of disciples included a stunning amount of political diversity. Simon the Zealot was part of the Zealot Party, which advocated armed overthrow of the occupying Roman Empire. Meanwhile, Joanna was the wife of a cabinet officer in King Herod's administration (Luke 8:1-3). Herod was appointed by Rome. Simon and Joanna were political polar opposites. Meanwhile, the disciple Matthew was a tax collector on behalf of the Romans, and several disciples were fishermen from whom Matthew would have collected taxes; they would have greatly resented Matthew's brand of politics. And yet they were all part of the same spiritual community learning how to love and respect each other, serving side-by-side.
 - a. Why do you think Jesus chose such a politically diverse group of disciples?
 - b. At LifeJourney, we want to model the same respect for political diversity. How do you feel about that? What are the benefits of politically diverse spiritual communities? What are the drawbacks?
 - c. Does anyone here feel your political views are sometimes disrespected at our church? If so, how?
4. Jeff told how the election results hit him so hard it was visceral. He told how, in the stress and anxiety of the moment, his bones and his muscles felt life energy draining out of them and his heart felt such heaviness he thought it might trigger a heart attack. How did the election affect you? And why do you think it affected you that way?
5. Strong reactions to the election raise an important spiritual question: How should people of faith respond when they find themselves in tumultuous spiritual times? For perspective we looked to the experience of the early Christians, who faced enormous persecution by the Roman government. Some were arrested, some were killed, and most were discriminated against. Read Revelation 4:1-2, 6:1, and 6:9-11.

How do you think the early Christians felt about the politics of their time? How do you imagine that political environment affected their lives?

6. In John's vision, the souls stuffed under altar represent Christians executed by the Roman government. They cried out, "Sovereign Lord, how long will it be . . . ?" The phrasing of their question indicates faith in the future despite their horrible present circumstances. For them, the question was not "if the discrimination would stop," but "when." They believed God's goodness and purposes would ultimately prevail. Do you have a similar faith about the present challenges we face? Why or why not?
7. In the '04 election cycle, President Bush prevailed by advocating that the Constitution be amended to forever ban gay marriage. It seemed like a huge defeat for LGBT equality. Yet the Supreme Court ruled in favor of marriage equality a decade later. The dialectic theory of history suggest that this kind of zigzag pattern toward progress is common: (a) **Thesis** – a new group of people advocates a new idea and progress is made; (b) **Antithesis** – cultural backlash against the new idea leads to set backs; and (c) **Synthesis** – if advocates don't give up, and keep advocating, eventually the new idea becomes part of the fabric of life. Do you buy this theory? If so, where in this cycle do you think we currently find ourselves in American culture and politics?
8. Confidence that goodness will ultimately prevail is encouraging, but standing alone, it's not enough. We have to be prepared to dig in and do our part. Since God has given us humans free will and delegated to us substantial authority to shape history on planet earth, God's will on earth cannot be accomplished unless we partner with God to make it happen. Viewed that way, the equation for progress looks like this:
Free will + Good will = God's will.
 - a. Read Galatians 6:9. What do you think it means?
 - b. Jeff said, "Partnering with God to make history is exciting; it's beautiful; but it's not for the faint of heart." Do you feel you have the strength to keep pushing forward? What do you feel called to do to make history better in our time?
 - c. Jeff said, "Now, more than ever, the world really needs radically inclusive churches like ours who let their light shine." What do you feel our church can/should do to make history better in our time?
 - d. Dr. King said, "Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that." On a practical level, how should we respond to people who speak about things like "White power" or chant things like "Build the Wall" to young Latino students? What does it look like to respond to provocations with light and love?

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