

Text: Luke 13: 31-35
Title: Politics
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During the run up to the 2016 presidential election the Pope and Donald Trump got into a dust up. When Pope Francis was asked about proposals to halt illegal immigration he responded, “A person who thinks only about building walls, wherever they may be, and not about building bridges, is not a Christian. That is not the gospel.”

Donald Trump took exception to that line and said that the pontiff’s comments were, “disgraceful.” In his words, “No leader, especially a religious leader, should have the right to question another man’s religion or faith.” Which is good counsel that Mr. Trump might have considered before he tweeted, “How can Ted Cruz be an evangelical when he lies so much and is so dishonest?”

Later in the news cycle the Trump camp pointed out that “an awfully big wall” surrounds Vatican City. In turn Catholic priests responded that while there is a big wall the front door is always open...

There’s so much more. You get the idea. It felt like one more day in the wilderness of today’s political discourse. But, overshadowed in that exchange between Pope Frances and Donald Trump was a wonderful little phrase.

Trump called the Pope "a very political person" and suggested that he was a pawn of the Mexican government. When asked about that the Pope replied, "Thank God he said I was a politician because Aristotle defined the human person as *animal politicus*. So at least I am a human person."

Dear friends, we are all political creatures.

You are *animal politicus*.

That does not mean that you follow politics. That is not even to say that you vote. But, it is to recognize that we live in relationship to others and to institutions, and that our behavior ~ how we work, spend, play, worship, etc. ~ has implications for others. We are all in this together. Politics is a kind of human currency. It is part of how we live in relationship to one another. And, therefore...

And therefore,

Jesus was also *animal politicus*.

Jesus was political.

Our text this morning finds Jesus in the middle of a political dust up. He’s on a collision course with Roman rule and Jewish jurisprudence. He is stepping into the messy intersection of church and state. And, while we shouldn’t hitch any particular political platform to this text, we can acknowledge that Jesus is enmeshed

in a particular political problem,

in a particular place,
at a particular time,
with a particular people,
when the Pharisees warn him of the intentions of a particular ruler.

Now. There's all sorts of speculation about why the Pharisees encourage Jesus to move on down the road. Most biblical scholars think they weren't doing Jesus any favors, but rather trying to maintain the status quo. They didn't want the disruption, so they warn Jesus with a nudge and a wink to take his healing and teaching business elsewhere.

In response Jesus calls Herod a "fox," which is better translated as "jackal." And jackals were wild mangy vermin that scavenged the garbage dumps outside of town. So, depending on inflection, you can read what Jesus says as a taunt:

Go tell that jackal, "I will keep on driving out demons and healing people today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will reach my goal..."

This testy exchange is set in different places in different gospels.

Luke places it in a series of stories where Jesus has turned from Galilee toward Jerusalem. Luke is lining up the actors in a political drama that will find its culmination in the cross.

Oh! And it should be noted: Luke references Jerusalem 90 times in his gospel. It is only mentioned 49 times in the rest of the New Testament. Luke is highlighting Jerusalem as the symbolic center of Jewish identity. So, when Jesus turns toward Jerusalem he is aligning himself with the prophetic tradition of Israel and speaking the heart of God to the heart of the Hebrews. He might have called Herod a jackal, but he turns his attention toward Jerusalem.

Therefore, gird up your loins!

Jesus is about to join his voice with all the prophets that preceded him. Jesus is about to get political. Except that, rather than launch into a righteous rant, Jesus imagines himself as a hen. Barbara Brown Taylor puts it this way:

Jesus did not liken himself to a rooster. He likened himself to a brooding hen, whose chief purpose in life is to protect her young, with nothing much in the way of a beak and nothing at all in the way of talons. About all she can do is fluff herself up and sit on her chicks. She can also put herself between them and the fox, as ill equipped as she is. At the very least she can hope that she satisfies his appetite so that he leaves her babies alone.

The politics of Jesus just took a strange turn in this barnyard menagerie. In one of the most beautiful images in all scripture Jesus gives voice to a mother's desire to gather her children to herself. No matter where they are,
no matter what they've missed,
no matter how they've messed up,
no matter how far away they've wandered,

no matter what shape they're in,
the mother hen would gently sweep her chicks under her wings in an act of belonging and comfort and refuge.

And, by the way, this is not the only place where a feminine image is used to describe God. For instance, God is also described as a protective mother eagle (Deuteronomy 32:10-11), a fierce mother bear (Hosea 13:8), and a mother giving birth and breast-feeding her child (Isaiah 42:14, Isaiah 49:15). God as feminine, good enough for Jesus and the writers of scripture, good enough for me....

So, dear friends, as those wandering in wilderness, even the wilderness of contemporary political discourse, can we find in this odd little juxtaposition of the jackal and the hen

some help,
some resource,
some image,
some light for how we might follow the way of Jesus?

Rev. Tony Van Zanten used to tell the story of dropping his kids off at school. They were new to Chicago. Camie and Kent, his children, were two of only a few white kids in a predominantly black school.

On the third or fourth day of school, when they pulled up to school Camie got out of the car, a group of girls called to her, and with a bright smile she ran over to their welcome. But, Kent, at 8 years old, put down his lunch box, turned his back to the playground, and clung to the fence. He looked out at the street and felt abandoned. Rev. Tony saw him as he pulled away. There were other people there, but Tony was the only one who saw his son clinging to the fence. Rev. Tony says he saw Kent and had compassion, because the eyes of love see things that others don't.

There is a tone of longing as Jesus imagines a hen gathering her chicks. And, later on in Luke when Jesus is approaching Jerusalem as he sees the city he weeps....

Jesus sees things differently.
Jesus sees with the eyes of love.
Jesus sees with compassion.
Jesus weeps for the loss of the things that make for peace.

The purpose of God in Christ is to be with people ~ to have the divine-human relationship restored, to gather his children unto himself. And as the longsuffering love of God wells up in the heart of Jesus, he doesn't see as the world sees, he sees with the eyes of love. So, Jesus longs to gather Jerusalem under God's sheltering embrace.

Dear friends, there is an endless maze of political possibilities and there are as many "Christian" political platforms as there are theologies. In our company this morning there are a multitude of perspectives. We represent all sorts of ideas about: securing borders, welcoming refugees, what to do in Iraq, Iran, Syria, and Yemen, gun rights and gun control, climate change, same sex marriage, the role and reach of government, what it means to be pro-life, etc. And I am not advocating one political philosophy over another. But, to follow the way of Jesus is to see things differently than the world sees.

We are “resident aliens.” We reside in states, we’re part of cultures, but our belonging and our ultimate sense of what the world can be is informed by the way and will of Jesus. And that, therefore, has political implications. It means that, often in stark contrast to the way of the empire, we would follow the path of Jesus.

Not the way of power but the way of the cross,
not the way of fear but the way of love,
not the way of retribution but the way of mercy,
not the way of lies and obfuscation but the way of truth,
not the way of the jackal but the way of the hen.

We may well interpret political implications differently. We may come to vastly different ideas about how to live with the eyes of love. But the way God, as embodied in Jesus, is to gather-in in-particular the vulnerable, the tossed aside, the stranger, the weak, and the broken. As Jesus announced in his inaugural address:

The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.

It should be noted, however, that God doesn’t gather, even *animal politicus*, by political agenda, or national identity, or ethnicity, or cultural persuasion, or sexual orientation, but by love, forgiveness, servant-hood, sacrifice, and crucifixion. Our hope is in a God who disrupts and overturns the machinations of this political world. Again, Barbara Brown Taylor:

It may have looked like a minor skirmish to those who were there, but that contest between the chicken and the fox turned out to be the cosmic battle of all time, in which the power of tooth and fang was put up against the power of a mother’s love for her chicks. And God bet the farm on the hen.

Dear friends our confidence is not in political positions or political leaders, our confidence is not in the jackal, our confidence is in the God who gathers in even us,

no matter where we are,
no matter what we’ve missed,
no matter how we’ve messed up,
no matter how far away we’ve wandered,
no matter what shape we’re in,
the mother hen would gently sweep us under her wings in an act of belonging and comfort and refuge.

And if God would do that for us, who are we to rule out that God would do it for any others.

Amen.