

**SERMON**  
**January 27, 2019**  
**The Reverend Dr. Phebe L. McPherson**

Luke 4:14-21

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me  
to bring good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives  
and recovery of sight to the blind,  
to let the oppressed go free,  
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

With over 30 days of *Government Shutdown* filling the news with stories about working people without food to eat, public servants unable to pay mortgages, airport delays and secondary economic fallout—I want to say something today about the workings of politics. The word itself originates from the Greek word meaning "affairs of the cities" and refers to the process of making decisions that apply to members of a group. It refers to achieving and exercising positions of governance—the organization of a human community. It is a multifaceted word. It has a set of fairly specific meanings that are descriptive and nonjudgmental (such as "the art or science of government" and "political principles"), but often carries a connotation of dishonest malpractice. For instance, the word has been used negatively for many years: the 1745 British national anthem calls on god to "Confound their politics!" And, the phrase "play politics" has been in use since at least 1853, when abolitionist Wendell Phillips declared: "We do not play politics; anti-slavery is no half-jest with us." And when everyone gets frustrated, then come the jokes...

Five surgeons were discussing who are the best patients in an operating room. The first surgeon says: "I like to operate on accountants, because, when you open them up, everything is ordered by numbers." The second surgeon answers: "Yes, but the electricians are better, because all the organs are color coded, so there is no way to make mistakes." The third surgeon adds: "No, the librarians are better: inside them everything is ordered alphabetically." The fourth says: "I must disagree mechanics are the best, they bring the spare parts that must be replaced." The fifth, finally, says: "I am sorry to dissent with everyone, but comrades, politicians are the best patients

in the world to operate on. They have no heart, no stomach, no guts, and in addition, their brains and their bottoms are totally interchangeable.

Politics. Yet — Who we are and how we live together is something about which the tenets of our faith has a lot to say—how we live and the way we relate to one another. As a matter of fact, the church, over the millennia, has gone through major shifts in its own governance—in an attempt to be more faithful. The form and shape of its governance, is what the reformation was all about! Who was to be in charge. How were decisions to be made? How was corruption to be averted. And what would become of the people whose lives were at stake?

Politics. The best solutions result, when the tenets of faith and practice can be best lived out. In this way, politics and faith come face-to-face. One of the things I've gleaned from the writings of Marcus Borg, a member of the Jesus Seminar and author of such books as "Meeting Jesus Again For the First Time" and "The Heart of Christianity" is this:

To call Jesus *Lord*, means that Caesar is not.

To call Jesus *Son of God*, means Caesar is not.

To call Jesus *Savior and Redeemer*, means that Caesar is not.

The embodiment of God in humanity is a deeply profound political statement. And when we seek to follow the life and teachings of Jesus we often wind up at odds with what is going on. Jesus' politics were driven, led, anointed and filled by the Spirit, the very life of God. His identity began not with national or party affiliation but with his baptism. He was immersed in the waters of creation. The heavens opened and the Spirit descended on him and a voice from heaven declared, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." Baptism is the beginning. This is what gave the initial shape to his life and his mission and his ministry. It is from that moment— that he was led by the Spirit into the wilderness —where he overcame the great temptations —the corrupters of human relationships and the way we live together—the corrupters of materialism, power, self-interest. In baptism and in the wilderness Jesus claimed his identity as a child of God and defined and clarified the message and mission and direction of his life. He left the wilderness empowered by and filled with the Spirit and taught in the synagogues

of Galilee. What he drew out of the holy scriptures made sense. And the people recognized the power of his truth.

Today's Gospel Lesson is so exciting, because it tells us EVERYTHING we need to know about who and what Jesus was about and who we are called to be! Jesus reads from the Prophet Isaiah:

*“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives  
and recovery of sight to the blind,  
to let the oppressed go free,  
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.”*

These words are the politics of Jesus. Good news to the poor. Release to the captive. Sight to the blind. Letting the oppressed go free. And, declaring God's favor. These are the building blocks, you might say, his “political platform.” They are not campaign promises but a present reality, meaning that these actions are the movement of God in the world and the work Jesus was sent to do. They are a movement, a reality made present in Jesus and for those who wish to follow.

Jesus has intentionally and purposefully chosen and arranged particular portions of Isaiah's text to create a specific message. It is his inaugural address. He establishes his priorities and the direction of his work. He casts his vision for the reordering of relationships in the context of the bigger picture—the subjugation of people to destructive powers—that were deliberately or inadvertently destroying the creatures of God. From here on out everything Jesus does is grounded in this politics of good news: Release, Sight, Freedom, and Divine Favor for all. He heals the sick, casts out demons, forgives sins, feeds the hungry, and raises the dead. His message is at the heart of his crucifixion and resurrection. And finally, his disciples get the word: *Divine favor knows no boundaries and has no favorites.* This is life-changing. This is world-changing.

*Yet each age is an age that is dying, or one that is coming to life.*

And so it must be the agenda in each new age. Because each family, each community, and each nation is one that is dying, or one that is coming to life. Divine favor is given to the poor, the captive, the blind, and the oppressed not because they are good or righteous, but because God is good and righteous. No one gets left out.

“The spirit of the Lord is upon me,” Jesus says. to bring good news to the poor, release to the captives, sight to the blind and freedom from oppression. The power of the Holy Spirit in Christ is the power to shake things up. These conditions—poverty, captivity, blindness and oppression are descriptions of powerlessness. The power of the Holy Spirit in Christ infuses the whole system with something new.... Here’s the point: Power as understood in the geo-political or financial circles is about the power to get ahead and to maintain that lead. The power of the Holy Spirit is the power to help OTHERS get ahead. Power is Christ’s power when it relieves the poverty of others, when it sets others free, when it opens other eyes and builds others up. Power is the power of God in Christ when it is used for the betterment of others around us.

Baptism does not make us children of God we are already that. All of us. Regardless of nation, race or creed. In Baptism we are immersed in the waters of creation, and born a second time so that we may hear the words—“You are my Child, my Beloved; with you I am well pleased.” COME ON IN, Kyle Meredith and Wyatt Donald! THE WATER’S FINE! You are God’s children, much-loved, and just great! Through this moment you are born and again with the power and direction of God in Christ, as your guide. From this moment forward— as a child of God we are all called to define and clarify the direction of our lives as given to us by the life and teachings and love of God in Christ. Here are the words of guidance, our rule of life— the platform and agenda we need—It is found in our own baptismal service:

Will you continue in the apostle’s teaching and fellowship?

Will you persevere in resisting evil?

Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News?

Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons?

Will you strive for justice and peace among all people

and respect the dignity of every human being?

This mission takes my breath away. It shakes us up and causes us to look at the world in a new way. In it, we share the mission of God in Christ.

Did you hear the one about the preacher who fell in the ocean and he couldn't swim? When a boat came by, the captain yelled, "Do you need help, sir?" The preacher calmly said "No, God will save me." A little later, another boat came by and a fisherman asked, "Hey, do you need help?" The preacher replied again, "No God will save me." Eventually the preacher drowned & went to heaven. The preacher asked God, "Why didn't you save me?" God replied, "Fool, I sent you two boats!"

And so God sends us good news in Christ that heals and releases and sets us free. As children of God we are all loved and called to define and clarify the direction of our lives. We are to love others as we have also been loved.

AMEN