

## **“Politics and Religion”**

The Rev. Ryan Wiksell



February 2, 2025

The Fourth Sunday after Epiphany

St. Michael's Episcopal Church

Independence, MO

May I speak with the Breath of God, from the Word of God, in the Name of God. Amen.

- **OK, so think back to when you're a kid, and you're being invited to a dinner party for the first time.**
  - Not to play with the other kids, but to actually sit at the table
  - What are some reminders your parents give you?
  - Utensils from the outside in?
  - Napkin on your lap: clap clap clap?
  - How about using a fork and knife: Fork's in your left hand while cutting, but then does it stay in your left hand to eat, or do you set the knife down and switch the fork to your right hand? (Discuss!)
- **That's polite eating. What about polite conversation?**
  - There's all kinds of advice you might receive about how to be a good conversationalist.
  - But maybe the most famous advice is to avoid two topics at all costs.
  - And what are they? Politics and Religion.
- **Why those two?**
  - We had a nice little debate just now about how to use your fork
  - Some say keep it in your left, some say switch to your right

- Did it devolve into name-calling? Did we lose any friendships over that? I hope not.
- My friend and I argued this morning over which quarterback has been more accurate this year, Mahomes or Josh Allen.
- I won't tell you which side I was on.
- Actually, I think I will. I'm ride-or-die for Mahomes and the Chiefs but I was arguing that Josh Allen was more accurate
- And I don't mind telling you this, because I know we can all still be friends if we disagree.
- **We can disagree around a dinner table about all sorts of topics.**
  - But for some reason we just can't stomach disagreements over religion and politics.
  - And that rule was probably created back when religion and politics were actually two separate topics.
  - Now it seems as though they've been merged into one.
  - And that's what I want to talk to you about.
- **One of the badges of honor, of being American, is our concept of separation of church and state**
  - For centuries and centuries church and state were the same thing
  - Or at least, intertwined beyond all distinction
  - And I want to talk about that word "separation" for a minute
- **In my mind, separation is a bad thing, within oneself or**
  - Or within relationships

- I believe we should be striving for integration, not separation
- **It's good for your faith to inform how you vote, and for your civic identity to influence how you understand God and faith.**
  - If Religion is just a Sunday morning thing, that's not really Faith.
  - And if Politics is just something we tweet about, or it's reserved for the ballot box, or a small circle of friends
  - Then we're not integrated.
- **And I wonder if that's why we're so uncomfortable with those topics at the dinner table.**
  - Don't ask me about Religion. Because I've worked hard to curate a certain persona and if you get me talking about Religion that might start to break down.
  - Same goes for Politics.
  - We work so hard to be seen a certain way, to be accepted by certain groups. And this arrangement depends on separation.
- **Separation might be unhealthy for an individual**
  - But I believe it can be healthy for a society
  - Namely, because of power dynamics
  - It's not healthy for a spiritual authority to send people to jail
  - Or for a political authority to tell you how to worship

- Separation of Church and State helps to keep these powers in check
- And that's decidedly a good thing.
- **BUT... Do you know what's coming? You've seen it coming...**
  - That society-level separation between Church and State is eroding isn't it?
  - The wall is crumbling.
  - And people are starting to get pigeon-holed by it
  - If you're Evangelical you must be Republican
  - If you're mainline (incl. Episcopal) you must be Democrat
- **And it puts people in a very awkward position. Especially when they're called to preach the Gospel.**
  - Speaking of the Gospel, here's where I actually come to that.
  - Because this morning we read about Simeon, who waited his whole life to meet Jesus and finally held him in his arms, as a baby, during his Presentation at the Temple
  - Simeon prophesied that Jesus would cause the falling and rising of many, and that this truth would pierce the heart even of his mother Mary.
  - This is a dramatic moment, but it's even more special than many people realize.
  - Because even Jesus' own family and his own disciples struggled with Israeli exceptionalism, imagining that Jesus was there to benefit their own nation over and against

others. But Simeon understood. He knew that Jesus was here, not only to be the glory of Israel, but a light to ALL nations.

- It took till after Jesus' resurrection for many to start getting it
- That Jesus wanted to end the separation brought about by nationalism and exceptionalism
- **Jesus wanted to share the heart of God with everyone**
  - He had a spiritual message that should have been non-controversial
  - God loves you just as you are. Despite your affiliations.
  - But certain humans came along... powerful humans... who decided that this message was dangerous.
  - And they took offense. Because it limited their control.
  - The message didn't change. The air around it did.
  - So that words of love became words of provocation. But they were the same words all along.
- **We Christians have been called, week in week out for centuries, to care for the needy and show compassion to the outsider.**
  - To welcome the stranger and heal the sick. None of that is political.
  - If someone wants to come along and make it political they can, but we will not cede this territory out of fear that our kindness will offend someone.

- In fact, we have been guaranteed that it WILL offend...
- Jesus warned us as much. And then he showed us what happens when you bring Politics and Religion to the dinner table.
- **But... he didn't stop doing it. He didn't let fear dissuade him.**
  - He knew that someone will always come along and try to pull that rug out from under you. But it doesn't change our message of Love.
  - Bishop Mariann Budde understands that better than anyone.
  - So I'm going to finish by quoting from her now-famous sermon at the National Cathedral on January 21.

The truth is that we are all people, capable of both good and bad. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn astutely observed that “The line separating good and evil passes not through states, nor between classes, nor between political parties, but right through every human heart and through all human hearts.” The more we realize this, the more room we have within ourselves for humility, and openness to one another across our differences, because in fact, we are more like one another than we realize, and we need each other.

Have mercy, Mr. President, on those in our communities whose children fear that their parents will be taken away. Help those who are fleeing war zones and persecution in their own lands to find compassion and welcome here. Our God teaches us that we are to be merciful to the stranger, for we were once strangers in this land.

May God grant us all the strength and courage to honor the dignity of every human being, speak the truth in love, and walk humbly with one another and our God, for the good of all the people of this nation and the world.

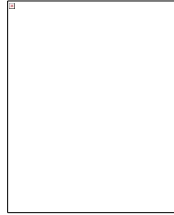
Amen.



**The Lessons Appointed for Use on  
the Feast of**

**The Presentation**

**February 2  
RCL**



Malachi 3:1-4  
Hebrews 2:14-18  
Luke 2:22-40  
Psalm 84  
*or* Psalm 24:7-10

**The Collect**

Almighty and everliving God, we humbly pray that, as your only-begotten Son was this day presented in the temple, so we may be presented to you with pure and clean hearts by Jesus Christ our Lord; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

**Old Testament**

**Malachi 3:1-4**

Thus says the Lord, See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple. The messenger of the covenant in whom you delight-- indeed, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts. But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears?

For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap; he will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the descendants of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, until they present offerings to the LORD in righteousness. Then

the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the LORD as in the days of old and as in former years.

## The Response

### Psalm 84

#### *Quam dilecta!*

- 1 How dear to me is your dwelling, O LORD of hosts! \*  
My soul has a desire and longing for the courts of the LORD;  
my heart and my flesh rejoice in the living God.
- 2 The sparrow has found her a house  
and the swallow a nest where she may lay her young; \*  
by the side of your altars, O LORD of hosts,  
my King and my God.
- 3 Happy are they who dwell in your house! \*  
they will always be praising you.
- 4 Happy are the people whose strength is in you! \*  
whose hearts are set on the pilgrims' way.
- 5 Those who go through the desolate valley will find it a place of springs, \*  
for the early rains have covered it with pools of water.
- 6 They will climb from height to height, \*  
and the God of gods will reveal himself in Zion.
- 7 LORD God of hosts, hear my prayer; \*  
hearken, O God of Jacob.
- 8 Behold our defender, O God; \*  
and look upon the face of your Anointed.
- 9 For one day in your courts is better than a thousand in my own room, \*  
and to stand at the threshold of the house of my God  
than to dwell in the tents of the wicked.
- 10 For the LORD God is both sun and shield; \*  
he will give grace and glory;
- 11 No good thing will the LORD withhold \*  
from those who walk with integrity.

12 O LORD of hosts, \*  
happy are they who put their trust in you!

*or*

## **Psalm 24:7-10**

### *Domini est terra*

7 Lift up your heads, O gates;  
lift them high, O everlasting doors; \*  
and the King of glory shall come in.

8 "Who is this King of glory?" \*  
"The LORD, strong and mighty,  
the LORD, mighty in battle."

9 Lift up your heads, O gates;  
lift them high, O everlasting doors; \*  
and the King of glory shall come in.

10 "Who is he, this King of glory?" \*  
"The LORD of hosts,  
he is the King of glory."

## **The Epistle**

### **Hebrews 2:14-18**

Since God's children share flesh and blood, Jesus himself likewise shared the same things, so that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by the fear of death. For it is clear that he did not come to help angels, but the descendants of Abraham. Therefore he had to become like his brothers and sisters in every respect, so that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make a sacrifice of atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself was tested by what he suffered, he is able to help those who are being tested.

## **The Gospel**

### **Luke 2:22-40**

When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, the parents of Jesus brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord"), and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons."

Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying,

"Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace,  
according to your word;

for my eyes have seen your salvation,  
which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,  
a light for revelation to the Gentiles  
and for glory to your people Israel."

And the child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, "This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed-- and a sword will pierce your own soul too."

There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped there with fasting and prayer night and day. At that moment she came, and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him.

---

*Optional parts of the readings are set off in square brackets.*

*The Bible texts of the Old Testament, Epistle and Gospel lessons are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA, and used by permission.*

*The Collects, Psalms and Canticles are from the Book of Common Prayer, 1979.*

*From The Lectionary Page: <http://lectionarypage.net>*