

The Cloud

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That Time We Talked about Politics

By Rev Joshua Reber (Trinity, Clear Lake; Faith St. Cloud; SCSU Campus Pastor; Editor of the Cloud)

Here's a thought experiment I learned from Doug Wilson (see Pastor Timm's book review for more info on him) - Jesus either approves of something, disapproves of something, or is indifferent. You went to church this week - Jesus approves! You skipped church this week because you were tired - Jesus disapproves! You picked the green smoothie over the red smoothie - Jesus is indifferent about it.

Okay, so now let's think about the political system. Many Christians think that Jesus is totally indifferent about what happens in the kingdoms of this world. But is that true? Does Jesus really not care that we legalize murder in the womb and that we approve of every sexual sin

under the sun? Jesus may be indifferent about some things. I'm not sure he cares if city hall is painted gray or eggshell. He may even be indifferent about the electoral college versus a popular vote. But is it rational to claim that Jesus is indifferent about corruption and sanctioned murder?

Since Jesus is Lord, He is Lord of everything. He is the Lord of my life. If that's not evident, that's a huge problem. He's the Lord of the church. If that's not evident, that's an even bigger problem. If He's not the Lord of the government, that's a huge problem, too. The question then becomes, "Who's in charge here?" Jesus is the Lord of everything, which means that nothing is off-limits to talk about.

At my first District Convention (2022), our circuit submitted a resolution promoting a Biblical worldview, and in that spirit, we denounced critical race theory, woke-ism, and groups that promoted those anti-biblical views. We named names for two reasons – speaking in abstractions isn't clear enough and groups like Lutherans for Racial Justice were causing confusion in our congregations. The resolution passed, but not until the convention weakened the language so that the resolution was utterly meaningless (all references to particular groups were removed and words like "we'll be nice" were added).

During the discussion of the resolution, a delegate got up to the mic and said, "This is the mistake of the post-Constantinian church – we're too involved in politics." If you don't know, Constantine was the first Christian to be Roman Emperor; he ruled from 306-337 AD. He famously legalized Christianity. What's funny about the delegate's comment is that we've been a post-Constantinian church for 1700 years; the pre-Constantinian church only lasted for 300 years. Has the church been a corrupt church for that long? If so, maybe Joseph Smith was right.

Whenever someone denigrates Constantine for ruling as a Christian, I always want to know what they'd rather have. The Emperor before Constantine was Diocletian. He murdered a lot of Christians. You have to ask - do you think Jesus approves, disapproves, or is indifferent about His saints on earth being slaughtered? For more on Constantine, read *Defending Constantine* by Peter Leithart.

Now that I've got you all riled up and defended our right to talk about the third estate (the government), you're prepared for an excellent issue. Pastor Buchs gets us thinking about democracy during a year when some have said that democracy is on the ballot. Pastor Timm overachieved this month and preaches to us a great sermon on Psalm 2 (for Transfiguration) *and* reviews one of my favorite books that was published last year, *Mere Christendom* by Doug Wilson. We've also got some pictures from things happening around the circuit. Thanks for reading the best Missouri Synod circuit newsletter in Central Minnesota.

An Election Year Homily

By Rev Bruce Timm (Redeemer, St. Cloud; MNN VP); Text: Psalm 2

If you want to make it through this presidential election year, I have some advice for you. Write Psalm 2:4 on several post-it notes. Post it on your television screen, underneath your car radio, on the back of your phone, on your earbud case. Wherever you hear or see the news, wherever the preaching pundits of our day are proclaiming doom and gloom if their man isn't elected, remember this, meditate on this, believe this, **"He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord holds them in derision."**

Why does the Lord laugh at all the raging and wrangling of earthly rulers and plotting people? He laughs because of Jesus, because Jesus is the King of the world, He laughs because Jesus has already defeated all the evil enemies of man when He was enthroned on the cross. Jesus' rule is as certain as His walking out of the cemetery on that first Easter morning. If the Father in heaven laughs you should laugh too, because after all through your baptism into Christ He is your Father.

Let's meditate on Psalm 2 because it enlightens us as to what the enemies of Jesus are up to, and it gives us laughter because of what the Lord has done and is doing.

"Why do the nations rage and the people plot in vain?" Good question, but the Psalmist doesn't give a definitive answer. The Psalmist is merely pointing out the foolishness of their actions. Why are you raging against God? Do you really think you're going to beat Him? Are you going to unseat His King from Zion? That second part of question could be translated, "Why do the people meditate on empty things?" Why are they chasing the wind?

Then the Psalm gives us one reason – the people are following their leaders. The body of

the nation is following its head. Whenever Christians talk about headship – like the headship of Christ over the church or the headship of the husband over his wife, people have allergic reactions and go into convulsions about the oppression of being subject to anyone. But everyone has someone over them, something to which they answer, or look to or trust. Half of our country is following one man and half is following another. Each half looks up to their guy and they follow him. The people rage against God because their leaders rage against Him and not just God, but against His anointed.

Be clear about this point. Almost everyone can tolerate a generic God, some big guy in the sky, sort of interested in earth and your happiness. They are opposed to the God who has His anointed, His Messiah, His Christ. They are opposed to Jesus of Nazareth. Why? Because they know about Jesus. They know He claimed to be The Truth and they want to dictate the truth. They know that He sets sinners free from guilt and shame, and they rule by guilt and shame.

Their goal is to throw off the reign and rule of Jesus Christ – **"let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us."** This is what they say in their rage. God is pro-life because He wants mothers to die and suffer. God is pro-marriage and He's oppressing the LGBTQ community. God arranged the family with the husband as the head and wants all women to be slaves in their homes. God provided one way into heaven therefore He's hateful and exclusive. Be clear. All of that is aimed at you, to make you guilty and ashamed of God so you keep quiet about the truth. Those who say such things are not neutral rulers. They are anti-Christian. They hate the truth, the life, and the freedom that Christ brings because it means you're going to follow Him instead of them.

Now we have the Lord's response to all their plotting. One thing to notice in the Psalms is

that there are often progressions of words. So beginning in vs 4 – the Lord *sits*, then He *laughs*, then He *holds* them in *derision*, then He *speaks*, then He *terrifies*, and then He says what He has been up to, **“I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill.”**

We just celebrated our Lord’s birth and we saw the politicians at work. Caesar Augustus was pulling a Governor Walz and raising taxes. Quirinius was governing Syria. Herod the Great was like our progressive politicians who believe there is no problem death can’t solve, so he killed the baby boys of Bethlehem. What was God doing? Saving the world by sending His Christ. He was setting His King on Zion. Jesus went to Mount Zion twice in the first forty days of His life. On the 8th day to be circumcised and on the 40th day to be presented as the first-born. In today’s Gospel reading Jesus is shown to be true God on the Mount of Transfiguration. There are three witnesses from heaven – Moses, Elijah, and God the Father, and three on earth, Peter, James, and John. From the Transfiguration Jesus headed to Jerusalem, to Mount Zion, to be crowned with thorns and lifted up in glory on the cross to usher in His Kingdom. At the cross your greatest enemies lost – your sin is taken away and because of that the Devil lost his bite. Death won’t be able to stomach you, just like the big fish couldn’t stomach Jonah. Because Christ rose you also will rise to life.

Christ Himself speaks in vs. 7-9 of the Psalm and we get to listen in to a bit of heavenly conversation between the Father and His Son. Fathers beget and sons are begotten and so the Son is begotten of the Father. The Father wills the nations to His son, and the ends of the earth as His possession. At one time it was said that the sun never set on the British Empire. Britain had colonies and territories around the globe, but those days have come to an end by

the raging of nations. Not so for Christ’s Kingdom, from the first day of the week when Jesus rose it has been growing and it’s going to last forever – people from every tribe and nation – even Germans, even Americans, even Minnesotans, even you. The kingdoms of this world stand as much chance against the Kingdom of Christ as a clay pot does against a tire iron according to the Psalmist.

Lastly in Psalm 2 we see the grace of God. Contrary to modern thinking God is not a vengeful tyrant. He warns His enemies so that they can become not His friends, but His family. **“Now therefore, O kings, be wise; be warned, O rulers of the earth. Serve the Lord with fear and trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled. Blessed are all who take refuge in Him.”**

Biblical Quiz Time: Who are the two people who kissed Jesus in the New Testament? Judas who betrayed the Lord with a kiss, working for the politicians. And the woman who anointed his feet with perfume while kissing them. Her worship of Christ scandalized the Pharisees and rulers of the Jews, but it is the Father’s way. No matter who you are, no matter what you’ve done, kiss the Son, believe Jesus is the Christ, the anointed Savior of the world and you have an eternal and blessed refuge. That’s what the Lord wants, not just for you, but for all His enemies.

When the press and politicians try to scare you with fear or motivate you with guilt, or silence you with lies, remember that He who sits in the heavens laughs, because His Christ, His King, rules in Zion the church, having defeated your enemies. Laugh, because you are safe in the refuge of His Kingdom, in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Democracy?

By Rev David Buchs (Concordia Fairhaven; CV)

“And those people should not be listened to who keep saying the voice of the people is the voice of God, since the riotousness of the crowd is always very close to madness.” Alcuin of York

I don't know anything about Alcuin of York except that he was a scholar from more than a millennium ago, and he was absolutely right about the crowd: it reigns with madness. And yet, it is a common notion that a majority vote can adequately settle a matter. It is the way Elon Musk decides things like where to put his Twitter (I refuse to call it anything else) headquarters. It is the way the kids decide which movie they're going to watch. It's the way many Americans imagine our government works. And it's the way that most congregations make big decisions.

Vox populorum est vox Dei. The voice of the people is the voice of God. That's painted on the wall above the speaker's desk in the Minnesota State House of Representatives Chamber. It's quite the claim. It's nothing so modest as “the voice of the people is the voice of wisdom”, or “the voice of reason”, or “the voice of the average”. No – the claim is that it's the voice of God.

That claim is always lurking in the premise of democracy. Democracy isn't just the rule (*arche*) of the people (*demos*), but the power (*kratos*) of the people. Rule implies governance and headship and an understanding of vested authority, while power imposes its will contrary to other wills. When men craft a god in their own image, he is often a tyrant. Democracy asserts itself as the honest admission that we the people would like our word to have final authority, and that we would like to be that tyrannical god.

What does the Bible have to say about democracy? Let's consider just a couple examples from the Scriptures.

Take the story of Israel asking for a king (1 Samuel 8). They raised up their voices in unison against Samuel and said, “**Appoint for us a king to judge us like all the nations**” (1 Sam 8:5). Samuel lamented their request and warned them against the dangers that would follow. They would come to regret asking for a king. You may think this episode would lead us to reflect on monarchy, but notice how the error is not in having a king. That, in fact, was God's design for Israel. The error was in asserting the will of the people. It amounts to nothing less than rejecting God. The voice of the people spoke, and, as often happens, God let them have their way. Four chapters later the people were grieved: “**Pray for your servants to the LORD your God, that we may not die, for we have added to all our sins this evil, to ask for ourselves a king**” (1 Sam12:19).

Next, consider the crucifixion. Pilate would have no authority if had not been given him by God. But, indeed, authority *had* been given to him by God. He had the authority to execute justice, to protect the innocent and prosecute the wicked. And even his temporal, earthly wisdom discerned that Jesus was clearly innocent. That is why Pilate had to wash his hands when he handed Jesus over to the crowd. He was subordinating himself to the will of the people. He was handing over the authority given him by God to the crowd, and they gladly received it as if it were their due. “**His blood be on us and on our children.**” They imagine they can swear by themselves, as if they were the final authority, and it results in the single most tragic upheaval of justice in the history of the world.

Let these examples simply serve as a rebuttal of the notion that the voice of the people is the voice of God. It is the greatest folly to imagine it were so.

What then? What's the alternative? Isn't it kind of the best we can do?

I agree with John Whitehead when he puts it like this: "God will bless a monarchy, aristocracy, or republic depending on the peoples' relationship to Him. A truly godly people cannot establish a democracy since it is an unscriptural form of government." (*The Separation Illusion*, p 57)

The alternative, in a reality quite unsatisfying to our sinful flesh, is faith in God. God intended to bless Israel with a king, but they turned the blessing into a curse when they put themselves in the place of God. God would have blessed the Jews through the governance of a Roman proconsul if they had received him as the wielder of God's sword. But they turned the blessing into a curse when they usurped his authority through the riot and frenzy of democracy.

The voice of the people is not the voice of God. Godly people recognize that good government requires their own proper understanding of authority granted by God – that is to say, they recognize that good government depends on their own faith in God. They also recognize that wisdom, which is essential for governance, regularly opposes the will of the people.

I don't think this affects how Elon ought to make decisions regarding Twitter, nor does it mean my kids should not vote for a movie. After all, Elon's not going to let the polls run his company, and I'm not going to let my kids choose an awful movie.

But I do think it certainly ought to make us reconsider how much we treasure majority rule in the state and in the church. (Right off the top of my head, I can think of several congregational, district, and synodical decisions by majority ballot, where,

regardless of what you think of the outcome, listening to the voice of the people was not the best way to make the decision.)

Let me leave you with two things. First, an exercise for you: what are the Biblical examples of faithful governance? (Hint: they always involve inquiring of God, trusting sanctified wisdom, or commending the decision to him by lot.) And second, think of it this way: someone has to be in charge, and it can't be everyone.

Book Review *Mere Christendom* by Douglas Wilson reviewed by Rev Bruce Timm

Doug Wilson is a prolific writer, preacher, blogger, theologian, publisher, and churchman. He also practices what he preaches. He learned and then further developed a strategy for spiritual warfare from his father. Find a relatively small city, with a college or two nearby, and bring the Kingdom of God there. That's how Doug Wilson came to Moscow, ID, founded Christ Church, New Saint Andrew's College, Canon Press, and Logos School to carry out his part of the battle. Through his writing and speaking he urges and inspires others to carry on the battle wherever they might be. That's why *Mere Christendom* was written, or more correctly "compiled." His grandson Knox compiled the book, organized the chapters, and synthesized Wilson's writings, blogs, and podcasts. The book consists of these collated thoughts. That's makes for easy reading, but not always smooth reading. Wilson is not a Lutheran. He is conservative Reformed. He's a Calvinist who loves and confesses the Westminster Confession.

In the first part of the book Wilson lays out the strategy and the problems inherent in secularism. In the second part he lays out *Mere Christendom*. In part three he debunks the lies about *Mere Christendom* Finally, part four is Wilson's guide on how to "restore Christendom."

What is the problem with America? Secularism.
What is the answer? Mere Christendom.

Secularism is the idea that “society can function without any reference to God.” Without God there is no one steering the ship, no guide, no compass. Man becomes god in secularism. Wilson asks a simple question in the first chapter, “How can we know what human rights are without knowing what a human is?” Without God, without the Lordship of Christ, the standards and principles which guide society have no anchor and no cohesiveness. Secularism always leads to chaos.

As secularism is in opposition to Christianity, Christianity opposes secularism on two fronts. First, the Gospel of Jesus Christ sets people free so only Christians know what true freedom is. Second, for Christians Jesus is Lord, which means He is over all things. He outranks every human institution. He informs every institution – church, state, family as to what their responsibilities are. Without His Lordship the church starts doing the work of the state, the state does the work of the family, and chaos ensues. As Wilson says, “If there is no God above Caesar how do we keep Caesar from declaring himself God?” (p 44)

Wilson has great skills at argumentation and is a knowledgeable wordsmith. He draws some specific conclusions that we might not agree with, but which would make for good theological discussion. For instance, in chapter two Wilson argues that if the state demands more than God demands (a tithe or 10%) then the state has made itself god. He also argues that if the government taxes us to do work that God did not give it to do – like paying farmers not to farm or funding murder through abortion – that is stealing from the taxpayer and therefore sinful.

Is Doug Wilson a Christian Nationalist? His own answer to the question is, “I’m a Christian and I love my nation. Now what?” Wilson does argue for a Christian nation, but not by force. That helps you understand the title of the book. The “mere” in the

title, I believe, is Wilson’s way of advocating this work of changing our nation in the same way Christ Himself and the early Church changed the western world. They weren’t afraid to speak the truth. They were willing to give up their lives for the Gospel and they believed Jesus was risen from the dead and ruled over all things. Wilson does not advocate any revolutionary overthrow of the powers that be. He does argue that anyone who holds to his confession (the Westminster Confession) is a Christian Nationalist because that confession states, “the duty of the Magistrate is ... that the truth of God be kept pure and entire.” He says we need a lot of faithful preachers who believe Jesus is risen from the dead and he’s saddened that many churches have abandoned that belief.

When discussing Church and State Wilson sounds like a disciple of Martin Luther. Instead of distinguishing between church and state Wilson argues for the three estates: Family government, Church government, and Civil government. Each has been given responsibilities by God and a proper relationship with the others. Wilson uses the illustration that a preacher (church) should not tell the auto mechanic how to change a head gasket (civic) but should tell the mechanic his bill should reflect his work and not cheat his customer. Wilson argues that the State has swallowed the church and the family in the United States.

In the last chapter of the book Wilson’s Calvinism shines through brightly. In my opinion, this chapter weakens Wilson’s arguments and inspiration. He seems to indicate that God will accomplish a glorious future on earth whether we are the ones to help Him or not. His post-millennialism becomes evident. (Ask Pastor Reber if you don’t know what that means.) The Epilogue was, for me, the most enjoyable chapter of the book. Wilson proclaims great confidence in the simple Gospel to do its work. He articulates the Gospel well and winsomely. This was a good read, which provided a lot of food for thought and some grist for the mill of theological discussion, especially as we live, move, and have our being in a secular state and nation.

News and Memes



Students and Pastors from circuit congregations smile at a confirmation retreat hosted at St. John's in Kimball.

Mad Libs

Dear _____ (congregation),

Due to _____ (adjective) mismanagement, our dear _____ (name of church institution) is

\$ _____ (number) in debt to _____ (online education company). Please consider

donating to our cause – have you considered selling your _____ (valuable item in church)? Or what about

having a fundraiser where the pastor has _____ (food product) dumped on him? Have you

considered selling _____ (plural animal) and _____ (plural animal) in your

_____ (area of the sanctuary) Please find pledge details at our website, _____

(4-8 letters with the letters l, c, and a somewhere).org.

We remind you at this time to keep the _____ (number between 7 and 9)th Commandment, which means don't say anything critical. Also don't expect us to be _____ (virtue in adjectival form, like *honest*), and then don't point out our inconsistency on the _____ (number between 7 and 9)th Commandment. Most importantly, don't publish _____ (title of any circuit newsletter in the Missouri Synod) with a _____ (name of word game) having a good time at our expense.

Sincerely,

_____ (Biblical name with German last name)



Students at St. Cloud State (and a few students from St. Cloud Tech and St. John's) cheesin' after Bible Study.