

The Politics of the Kingdom

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We're in our final passage of 2 Peter, then moving into our Advent season, *The Difference of Christmas*, which is a great time to invite friends and neighbors to consider the difference Christmas makes. And this year we're seeking to be a people of biblical depth, spiritual growth, and public faith. This morning is no exception. There's been a lot of tension in our country this week, so let's see if our sermon text can be of help. Polis, Patience, Grace.

Ordering the Polis

This election has been tense and revealing. One thing it reveals is a tension in our country, not simply between the right and the left, the black or the white, but more fundamentally, between what it means to be a Christian and what it means to be an American (Scott Moore, [interview](#)). An American brandishes freedom, a Christian is a slave to Christ. An American is carefree with language, a Christian possesses careful speech. With slander, hatred, despair, self-righteousness, and anger swirling around us, even through us, *we need to take a step back and reassess our politics*. Regardless of where you fall on the political divide, it should be abundantly clear that America is not our home: “**Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace**” (3:14). Waiting for what? The immediate reference is to “*we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells*” (13). What kind of new creation? One where righteousness dwells. The word righteousness has to do with justice, beauty, human flourishing. It combines these ideals around what's right, what's true. Now in order to get there, we need someone who is righteous, without flaw, who's true. Recall the opening of the letter: “**To those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ**” (1:2). The righteous king who will secure a righteous world is not Republican, Democrat or American. That king is Christ and his rule is righteous. So while America is not our home, the earth most certainly is, just not in its present form. How then should we live in a pre-righteous, post-election world? V 14: “**be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace.**” A shirt that is without spot or blemish is clean, pure, everybody loves a new shirt. The way to live post-election is with purity of heart, to bring the righteous future right into the present. Not by judging others but by judging *yourself*. Be *diligent* (same word from chp 1), make every effort not in being perfect but moving toward it. What does that look like right now? First, a righteous person is a grateful person. Regardless of how you feel, we live in a country where we have the privilege of participating in free elections to choose a leader. Do you know how many countries would love to do that? A righteous person is a grateful person. Second, diligence in holiness requires we evaluate our politics. Aristotle, who profoundly shaped the social and political life of the West, suggests that politics is not primarily statecraft but an *ordered polis*, the word for city. The polis has three constituent parts: household, village, and polis. We say family, neighborhood, city. To order them, you need virtue and without virtue, he says, we become the most savage of animals, doing injustice to the city. **You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people.** He's saying, beloved family, my special people in whom I've placed my Spirit, don't get carried away in the name-calling, self-righteous judgment, and despairing attitudes. You know beforehand, what's coming. You

know how it all ends, a new world where righteousness dwell! So consider your future, and bring its order into the present. How? Order the parts from the bottom up: individual, family, community, city. Your politics are primarily expressed, not in how you vote but how you live. With your fellow man, woman, child...of every ethnicity or creed. The order of the country is the order of your life, citizen, your family, your City Group, your city. It's how we raise our kids, nurture friendships, cultivate communities, and love our co-workers. (Scott Moore, *The Limits of Liberal Democracy*). Our politics come from our King, who taught us to love our neighbor *and* our enemy, to forgive us our sins *and* those who sin against us, to pray for every person in authority. Your politics church are ordered by kingdom of Christ not the presidency of Trump. It's how we choose to live together, not what happens in D.C. It's how we order our lives, we spend our time, love our neighbor. Jesus calls us to a city on a hill, an alternative politic of ordered loves and ordered lives burning with the Light of the city that is to come. Trim your torches to Zion. Look to your King. He rides, not on a blue donkey or a red elephant, but a white horse, and his name is *Faithful and True* (Rev 19:11). Worship him, not a pretender to the throne. Worship Christ and order your lives with righteousness carried from the new creation.

Counting the Patience

So how do you do that? I think it's pretty intuitive and plainly written all over the Bible. Do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God. Go to M2 today to love, serve, & listen to our Hispanic & African-American neighbors. Ask how they're doing post-election. Listen to a co-worker and offer prayer & hope. But let's answer it from here: "And count the patience of our Lord as salvation..." St. Paul says this elsewhere, like in 1 Timothy 2, so if you don't take it from me, take it from Paul. What he saying about *patience*? I think Peter's sympathizing with us *and* challenging us: "I know it can be wearying, with everything crumbling around you, and sometimes you wonder if Jesus is going to come back, and you're caught between this world and the world to come, but count—consider—*that the longer he waits to come, the more people get into the kingdom, the more people are rescued from sin, death, and hell to enjoy righteousness, resurrection, new creation.* That's the sympathy. Now the challenge. Are you telling people about the alternate city that promises judgment and salvation? Are you reordering the polis in faithful gospel witness? You say, but people shirk at "the truth," insisting there are many truths. I want to say, What people? Give me names. Tell me their stories. Are you showing them mercy? Demonstrating justice? But say you've been influenced by this "many truths" view. You don't stick to "many truths" when there's a discrepancy over your bank account or when someone has stolen your property. Suddenly, there's a single truth, a definitive way of looking at things. You don't have too go far to find people actually believe in a single truth. It's just that they are inconsistent. Insisting on the truth only when it's convenient. Are you telling the truth only when it's inconvenient? Will your friend look over at you at Judgment Day and say, why didn't you tell me? Augustine: "Man's love of truth is such that when he loves something which is not the truth, he pretends to himself that what he loves is the truth" Friends, the politics of the kingdom shatters such illusions, and for a time offers a way out, salvation by faith alone in Christ alone, a liberating truth. Leonard Cohen died this week, known for his songs, Bird on a Wire, Halleljuah, & So long Marianne. In late July, he received a letter telling him that Marianne, his former wife, had cancer and only a few days to live. Cohen wrote back: "Well Marianne, it's come to this time when we are really so old and our bodies

are falling apart and I think I will follow you very soon. Know that I am so close behind you that if you stretch out your hand, I think you can reach mine...I wish you a very good journey. Goodbye old friend. Endless love, see you down the road." Two days later he received this email: Marianne slept slowly out of this life yesterday evening. Totally at ease, surrounded by close friends. Your letter came when she still could talk and laugh in full consciousness. When we read it aloud, she smiled as only Marianne can. She lifted her hand, when you said you were right behind, close enough to reach her...in her last hour I held her hand and hummed "Bird on the Wire," while she was breathing so lightly. And when we left the room, after her soul had flown out of the window for new adventures, we kissed her head and whispered your everlasting words, So long, Marianne. What a sweet illusion. A journey, an adventure, says who? The new creation? That requires Christ. The only hand that can reach back from death, is the nail-scarred hand of Christ. He alone can conquer death and give us post-mortem life. He alone possesses endless love; he alone can welcome us into an everlasting adventure. Deep down, we all know truth matters, but we suppress it so that we can love what isn't true (Augustine). We settle for what's false. Peter says guard yourself from wandering off into this lawlessness. Righteous reality will catch up with you. And if you're not clinging to Christ, it will shut you out of salvation. Order the city by counting the patience of the Lord as salvation. Tell your neighbor the truth, Advent.

Growing in Grace

Finally, grow in grace: "But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen" (18). People will inherit the new world only if they grow in grace and knowledge of Jesus. Those who give lip service to Christ but do not mature into his image will not enter the new heavens and earth. Growing in grace is not optional; it is essential. How do you do it? Not by running up the bill on sin and then asking God to clear it just before you die. That's maligning grace. Growing in grace actually changes you. It draws you closer to Christ. It makes you like him, not indifferent to him. In the play *Les Mis*, Jean Valjean is serving hard time for a petty crime. After 19 years, he's released. Destitute, he's taken in by a kind bishop. Jean abuses his kindness by stealing the priest's silver. The police catch him the next day and bring him back to the priest for identification. *But instead of banishing Jean to prison once again, the priest insists that the silver was a gift.* It's a moment of jaw-dropping grace. Jean deserved prison but received favor—forgiveness of a debt. This is grace, but how does it prove the necessity of growing in grace? The moment defined his life. He didn't go on and live life however he saw fit. He vowed to become a better man, rises in society and eventually become the mayor of a city. He uses his wealth and influence to help the poor, the needy, the prostitute and revolutionizes the city's economy by creating many factories and jobs. He ordered his life and the city. The proof that he was growing in grace is that he distributed grace. He took on the priest's qualities—generous, kind, forgiving, gracious, sacrificial. When we're growing in grace, we don't just receive the gift; we embody it. Christ's absorbing our debt and giving us new life becomes the moment that defines our lives. Its up to us to show this grace to those around us. Sometimes in fits and starts, with ups and downs, but the proof that we've received grace is that we can't help but give grace. You know you're growing in grace, when you allow that forgiveness to change you, to redefine who you are, to become more forgiving and more gracious. Grace overlooks others faults. Grace stoops to serve. Grace absorbs the cost. Grace tips when it isn't deserved.



Grace welcomes the poor, the needy, the sinner, the self-righteous. Grace takes the long view of people; sees what they could become, not just who they are. Grace reorders the city, counts the patience of the Lord as salvation, and invites others in. Grace keeps no record of wrongs, even when you're right. Grace offers a whole new world even when we've mucked it all up. Grace grows and grows and grows up into the form of Jesus. Grace changes everything. And where does this radical, life-changing idea come from? To *Him* be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. All glory be to Christ, the fountainhead of grace, the king of righteousness and truth.