

Politics.

I did a bit of a search this week – to educate myself on what’s out there – and found on different pages compelling arguments stating that Jesus would, apparently vote Republican...or Democrat ... or Independent.

Politics.

Today is the perfect day to talk about Politics. Today’s scripture from the Gospel of John is FULL of politics. Who did the people think that Jesus was? Who did Jesus represent? What are OUR political expectations surrounding Jesus?

I could use political language - what does it mean to “vote Jesus.” What did Jesus’ campaign trail look like? What was his “road to glory?”

It seems as if we’re coming into a season – a week – right now where it suddenly becomes very important that we hear the whole story. Why? So that we can know it, so that we can tell ourselves and our neighbours, and so that the story and the characters can again begin to make a home in us.

You can already probably guess where I’m partly going with this. Keeping in mind our own political expectations of Jesus, let’s pick up the story directly after Christ’s triumphal entry on the donkey into Jerusalem from the Gospel of John chapter 12:19-36.

Scripture read

The festival that is named in verse 20 is the Passover, and Jesus just arrived in the bustling city of Jerusalem, a city filling up with pilgrims and people doing business with the pilgrims.

The energy must have been obvious, tensions running high with lots of people in proximity. And Jesus seemed to be single mindedly driven to some future purpose that he knew, and we know – but the disciples had no clue. The end was near, and the cross was close.

Big story. Lots of expectations. Who was this guy, Jesus, and what’s all this talk of glory?

I can just hear all the discussion from all the characters in this story... Could this be the messiah? Is this the long-expected liberator? I’ll anoint his feet and I’ll lay down some palm branches. I’ll figure out a way to trick him into making a mistake and I’ll find a way to kill him. I’ll go ask him what he’s all about.

Sure sounds like Jesus is part of a political race. However, it’s not only the glamorous entry into Jerusalem, or the shocking scandalous foot anointing that tells us of Jesus’ political platform. What is most telling is what happens afterwards...a conversation Jesus shares with his disciples, a bunch of Greeks, and Philip and Andrew.

You could, perhaps, envision this whole exchange in John 12 as a bit of a comedy. We have these unnamed Greeks who apparently were among those who went up to worship at the festival. They’re not

Jews but may be “God-fearers”, as the Jewish people called them, people like Cornelius in the book of Acts who honour the God of Israel even though they’re not part of the birthright.

And these Greeks are interested in talking to Jesus. So, they scope out the people surrounding him and as they nonchalantly ask around and maybe lean in and listen to the conversation, they find out that there’s a Philip in the group! A man with a Greek name, he’ll listen to us!

So, the Greeks approach Philip and say “Sir, we wish to see Jesus”. Philip doesn’t know what to make of this, I mean, sure, he’s got a Greek name, he comes from a very diverse city, but his Rabbi is here for the lost sheep of Israel, right? These folks aren’t part of the covenant. But Philip’s a nice guy so he says “ok, just a second”, and he goes and grabs Andrew.

With the Greeks still waiting in the wings, Philip and Andrew go and tell Jesus. And Jesus says, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified”. And here we have the first part of the platform:

The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.

This is probably the point where Philip and Andrew started thinking that maybe Jesus was taking this a little too seriously and they probably shouldn’t have bothered Jesus after all.

The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.

Oh good. Was it time for Jesus to step out and take control? Was he finally going to win over all the people and save the whole nation of Israel from their oppressors? No. Jesus’ idea of glorification was much different than ours. He continues – almost with the same breath: “Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit” (12:24).

Jesus continues: “Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor” (12:25-26).

“Now my soul is troubled”. “Should I ask God to save me from this? Of course not, this is what I came for in the first place.” And then he prayed: “Father, glorify your name”. And a voice from heaven says, “I have, and I will again.” The crowd hears that, and some say, “That’s thunder” and others “wow, it’s an angel!” This guy MUST be the one!

But I just see Jesus shaking his head, sighing... “This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. 31Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. 32And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.”

I don’t think that this is how our present-day politicians would gain supporters. Jesus’ campaign trail is turning out to be far far different than anyone ever imagined. Jesus was on the road to glory, but the cheering crowds ended with the palm branch waving. But the attention he got in those last days brought out a lot of confrontation and distrust, and eventually violence and death.

Jesus’ path to glory isn’t now and wasn’t then how the world described glory. Sure, Jesus blessed babies, but there were no grand homes, no rich stipends for staff, no make-up or special wardrobes, no

official pets or private airplanes. There was only a young donkey – not a warhorse – a short little noisy beast...probably scared out of its wits from the ruckus around it. Jesus' road to glory was a path of obedience, of servanthood, and even suffering and death.

Newton's law of motions says, "For every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction." Jesus is talking to his followers about letting go, in verse 32 he's talking about drawing them to himself. Imagine it in this way, that for Jesus to be able to draw us to himself, and ultimately to God - there is some way that we need to be ready to let go and follow him. Other roads to glory might have allowed Jesus to glorify his own name, but this is the path that leads to God's name being glorified.

And this is Jesus' ultimate campaign promise – that all who follow him will enter a path of obedience to God – not to the world or to their desires – but a path of obedience to God so that GOD is the one who is glorified. The politics of Jesus – of the Kingdom – are different than the ways of the world. And when I think of this "counter-cultural" way of living, I cannot help but think of the early Anabaptists.

I have this book called Reading the Anabaptist Bible, edited by Arnold Snyder and Galen Peters. It's a set of daily readings that is based on a biblical concordance that was collected and published by Anabaptists around 1540. The concordance was this tiny, thick book that would hide well in a boot or another piece of clothing, out of sight of the authorities. Arnold writes in the preface that the concordance was "a collection of what these believers considered to be the 'most important' biblical texts from the entire Bible".

They were "gathered under the topics that the compilers believed were the most important biblical topics in the Bible. These were the verses Anabaptist believers were to remember and memorize. "And they did remember them. Although Anabaptists certainly wouldn't have been allowed to keep their concordances on them when they were arrested, if you read through their testimonies and the letters they wrote home from prison in the Martyr's Mirror, you will find many quoting extensively from their memory from the collection of Bible passages.

The Anabaptists knew God's word by heart, and from Jesus' promises they drew strength for whatever torture or martyrdom the rulers and church leaders placed before them. As they spoke of what they understood from God's word, they hoped their words and even their death would bear the fruit of God speaking to the hearts of those they loved, including their enemies. And even as they did this, they were preparing themselves to let go of their lives.

What do you expect Jesus to be like? Are you willing to cast in your lot with Jesus – knowing full well his counterculture/humble party platform? Maybe we can get some encouragement – and reminders from Philippians 2:5-11.

Scripture read

May we be becoming people who seek to know God wholly and completely – even when God's ways are strange to us. And may God create within each of us a servant's heart that carries God's instructions, an open mind that knows we are forgiven, and a willing spirit that serves, follows, and goes where Jesus is.