



Grace Church

The Rev. Dr. Matthew Calkins
Rector

Stand in the Place Where You Live

Sermon for Christ the King Sunday, November 20, 2016

Readings: Jeremiah 23:1-6; Canticle 16; Colossians 1:11-20; Luke 23:33-43

Sermon text: Almighty and everlasting God, whose will it is to restore all things in your well-beloved Son, the King of kings and Lord of lords: Mercifully grant that the peoples of the earth, divided and enslaved by sin, may be freed and brought together under his most gracious rule; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen (Collect for this Sunday, BCP 236).

What divides us and what brings us together? If we follow the Collect for this Sunday we will say that sin divides us and the rule of Christ brings us together. What is the rule of Christ? The rule of love: love of God and love of neighbor. What is sin? That which separates us from the love of God and each other.

All very well and good. Love is the answer. Sin is the enemy. Okay. But how does this highest-order generality apply to situation we find ourselves in following the election of Donald Trump as the next President of the United States? We find ourself living in a very divided county—and would face the same division, though with different winners and losers, protesters and job applicants, if Hillary Clinton had won the electoral college as well as the popular vote.

I will share two basic thoughts about that, adding my two cents on what we as Christians might do in the months and years ahead. I will refrain from adding to the voluminous commentary on how and why this election played out the way it did, surprising pretty much everybody—including, I suspect, Donald Trump.

But before that let me talk about music. I have music on my mind for a few reasons. One is the death very recently of a couple of musicians I admire, Leonard Cohen and Mose Allison. You are probably familiar with a number of Cohen's evocative and poetic songs, such as "Hallelujah," "Bird on a Wire," "Susanne". You may be less familiar with Mose's great hit, "Your Mind is On Vacation, But Your Mouth Is Working Overtime." I recommend going to [Youtube](#) and checking it out.

A little more silence as well as music is what our friend Father Masud ibn Seydullah suggests works well in interfaith prayer. The suggestion came up during a meeting of the Monday Club, a monthly clergy gathering in this area. Masud presented on his experience of teaching music and leading interfaith retreats and workshops. Growing up with a Muslim father and a Christian mother, he is uniquely qualified to help bridge the often deep difference between these faiths. It is a task that has become ever pressing with the rise of Islamic extremism and the reaction of mistrust and blanket condemnation of Muslims from some in the western countries—including our own. The usual form of getting together involved assembling clergy and lay people of different faiths for “dialogue.” But I asked how he went about getting folks to **pray together. Less talk, more silence. And music**, particularly the sort of chant that Masud knows so well from the brothers in Taizè.

Brother Roger and his companions have been working in the ministry of reconciliation since the end of World War II. They know something about getting people together, especially young people, and worshipping with less talk and more silence and music. We connect on a deeper level in silent prayer and when singing together.

You know how songs can get stuck in your head? All week I have had two songs running in my head—completely unrelated to anything overtly religious (which rules out “Hallelujah”). One is a song by R.E.M., “Stand.” Abby challenged me to sing it to you—saying she would attend if I did—so here goes. Brace yourself. The refrain goes like this:

Stand in the place where you live
Now face north
Think about direction
Wonder why you haven't before

Stand in the place where you work
Now face west
Think about the place where you live
Wonder why you haven't before

It is a movement song, isn't it? The lyrics invite us to stand—so please stand. And when I sing and say face a particular direction, do so. Our church is aligned so that you are facing south when facing the altar. So when I change the lyrics slightly and say, “Now face east ” you make a small jump turn to your left and face the chapel wall. When I sing on the next verse, “Now face south” jump back to facing the altar. Got that? All right. let's try. (repeat lyrics above with slight change in directions.)

Since you are standing, let's also sing together. The other song that has gotten stuck in my mind is “La Bamba”— a big hit with Richie Valens— a Mexican-American from California who had a big hit with this Mexican folk song in 1957. He died two years later in a tragic plane crash with Buddy Holly. “La Bamba” is a great movie about him with Lou Philips Diamond—highly recommended. It was covered wonderfully more recently by Los Lobos. Another Youtube recommendation.

You know how it goes

Para bailar la Bamba,
para bailar la Bamba,
se necesita una poca de gracia.
Una poca de gracia para mí, para ti,
ya arriba, ya arriba,
ya arriba, ya arriba,
por ti seré, por ti seré, por ti seré.

Yo no soy marinero,
yo no soy marinero, soy capitán.
Soy capitán, soy capitán.
Bamba, bamba,
bamba, bamba,
bamba, bamba, bam.

The translation is “to dance the Bamba you need a little grace, a little grace for me and for you. Come on come on. For you I’ll be, for you I’ll be, for you I’ll be.
I am not a sailor, I am not a sailor. I am a captain. Soy capitán. Soy capitán.

Who doesn’t want to be the captain? “I am the master of my fate. I am the captain of my soul” (“Invictus”). Well, no. Or anyway, you are only the captain of a small boat, a fishing vessel. You are not the king, if you are a Christian. God is in charge and you have pledged to follow Jesus.

He is the king, the master and we are the subjects, the servants. This is hard for us modern individualists. We prefer thinking of Jesus as the teacher (rabbi) and we as disciples, students. But the main thing is to remember that Jesus, knowing he was to go and offer himself on the cross—the ultimate act of self-giving leadership—said to his disciples, “I no longer call you servants but friends” (John 15:15).

So how does this connect to our response as Christians to the recent election of Donald Trump?

Here’s my take. First, stand facing left and say: If you are true followers of Christ, then you have to take his message to love your enemies—whichever side you find them—seriously. As St Paul wrote, we have are Christ’s ambassadors of reconciliation. We do not stand reflexively in opposition but we stand in the place where we live—in this place, this region, this country, this world, this planet. And we think about direction, we think about the future. We see what happens around the world when the forces of sin—pure self-interest, tribalism, demonization of the enemy—take root and lead to civil war. Then we get the horror stories, the refugees, the deep generational wounds so hard to heal. We cannot go there in this country. We must always search for common ground on which to work together for a better future. This does not mean papering over disagreements nor refraining from speaking the truth as you see it about

the problems and faults of leaders. But it does mean you must always be prepared to reach out and forgive and work together. Without name-calling.

And if that is a message for those on the left, then Jesus has also a message for those on the right. Love your neighbor—especially when he or she is poor, hungry, homeless, a stranger, a refugee. Serving that person is serving me, Jesus said in Matthew 25. And this means standing for the rights of those who find themselves under attack, defenseless—no matter how that situation developed. In our place, in this rural context, it means standing for and with the Latino immigrant community. How you make your stand for and with is less important than the stance itself. No one has easy answers. Securing a country's borders is a good thing—and no one is arguing that felons should not be deported. But here at Grace we have a long history of reaching out to the Latino community. This service itself is a form of that. So is our youth leadership program under Abby's direction. We will not turn from that mission. We will stand with and for our neighbors.

Because we stand with the king. Serving as ambassadors of reconciliation in this place where we live—together, as friends, not enemies. With love, not hate. With joy no matter what sorrow. With hope, because God is in charge. As the old country gospel song goes, "I don't know what tomorrow holds, but I know who holds tomorrow."

In Christ's name, Amen.

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