

Proper 11, Year C
July 20, 2025

Let's talk about the separation of Church and State.

Used to be if I campaigned from the pulpit, we – St Thomas/Grace – would be in danger of losing our tax-exempt status.

Well, it seems the Supreme Court has just ruled that I can not only campaign for a political candidate in my gospel message to you, but I can tell you who you should vote for. Next on the list, not only will it be okay if I tell you who to vote for, I will be told who to tell you to vote for; then I will be told I must tell you who you must vote for. And when I refuse, then what happens to our tax-exempt status?

Let us always have as our North Star that there is one God, whose one eternal Son God sent to save us from ourselves, to become as we are but without sin; and this Son is the very image of the invisible God - we hear in Colossians - who adopts us through baptism to be God's children. This is the very God who throughout Hebrew Scripture we were not allowed to look at because we would die, and Jesus, the very mirror image of God, shows us what God looks like! There is no other thing and no other mortal – no man, woman or child on this earth – who is God or God's Son. And if we believe otherwise, when we turn to some earthly powerful figure to save us, we are not only setting ourselves up for a big disappointment, but we are violating the first and greatest commandment: there is but one God and you shall love the Lord, your God, with all your soul, with all your heart, with all your strength.

Naught be all else to me, save that thou art we just sang: nothing else matters to me except knowing that You Are: I Am that I AM.

And that's the closest I will ever get to telling you who to vote for!

What we all need is discernment, and discernment is prayer that involves using our ears and eyes: we need to figure out where instructions telling us how to live - who to vote for - are coming from. Is this from God? Or is this from the culture around me – workplace, popular opinion, the internet, a particular news source, my personal beliefs, my ego, my desire to get ahead, or even those things I was brought up to believe as a child? *When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I thought as a child, I understood as a child; but when I became an adult, I put away childish things.* Things are not necessarily the same as they were 50 years or more ago. There are modes of speech and life-styles that are no longer acceptable and there are some that are now acceptable and were not in the past: some of the more obvious changes are that slavery and child labor are no longer legal and women now have the vote. Consider

what people around you are telling you is right: be willing to challenge the *status quo* if it doesn't align with what your gut is telling you. But if the messages you are getting involve love, they are probably from God. God does not want us to make choices that will bring suffering and pain, either to ourselves or to others: *everything that is good comes from God*. Just as we want only good things for those we love – family members, pets, friends – so each one of us is *precious in the sight of God*, who loves us, his adopted children.

Allowing me or others standing in the pulpit to become a source for your decisions can be a quick, easy solution to your challenges. And I believe that's a key ingredient for why folks give up on church, on "organized religion:" because we are looking for easy answers and there are times when "church" seems to hand out easy answers like candy bars at Hallowe'en: I ask God to make my mother's cancer go away, but she dies six weeks later, so what good is God? is there really such a thing as "God" if he let my mother die? I ask Jesus why kids around the world don't have enough food to eat, give money to "Save the Children" and then turn around and hear that 24 kids died in a flood while they were at Christian sleep-over camp so where's Jesus? If that God doesn't hear my prayers, I'll find one that does and it certainly won't be in church.

Discerning God's will is hard work. There are no easy answers. We listen to and read about the history of God's people, how they struggled with overwhelming circumstances, how they turned away from their Creator and listened to false promises telling them what they wanted to hear. Moses, why have you brought us out to this desert where we are going to starve? We would be better off as slaves in Egypt; at least we would have shelter and enough food to eat and water to drink. It makes sense in 2025 to see what the end result was then - that God was with them the whole time, as they tramped through the desert. God was the Light at the end of the tunnel. But without a discerning faith, we do not learn from those struggles we witness in scripture; it's difficult to feel God's presence now as we sit in the midst of chaos and confusion; ours seems to be an endless struggle, with no relief in sight, no hope, no God.

Have compassion on our weakness, and mercifully give us those things which for our unworthiness we dare not, and for our blindness cannot ask, we prayed this morning.

Hang in there, we tell ourselves and one another. Hang in there and listen for God's voice speaking through the earthquake, wind and fire.

Be with us, Lord Jesus; we ask thee to stay close by us forever and love us, we pray.

