

Week of Christian Unity

1 Corinthians 12: 12-31a

Luke 4: 14-21

May I speak in the name of God, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen

Is politics for the pulpit?

Maybe a risky question to start us off. But maybe one that needs to be thought about. Our Gospel reading from Luke witnesses to the first recorded words of Jesus' ministry. He reads from the prophecy of Isaiah in the Synagogue.

Jesus is outlining his politics. He is describing the character of his ministry. He is establishing his priorities and the direction of his work. He is casting his vision for relationship – good news to the poor, release to the captive, sight to the blind, letting the oppressed go free, and declaring God's favour.

So often we are worried about bringing politics to our conversations, and this is particularly true of the Church. For fear of offending, for lack of understanding, for worry of being judged... whatever it is, something about politics makes us uneasy. I remember being sat in the barbers (prime location for awkward and forced conversation) and the barber asked, 'so what do you do?' Little did he know how loaded this question was.

"I am training to be a priest" I replied. Usually, I'm met with fascination and then the questions come thick and fast.

However, this barber was still training and at my unexpected reply, he froze. He apologised and explained that he had been taught to not talk about religion, politics, or anything deeply personal – but instead to keep conversation light. Unfortunately for him, there was no escape after asking that question and I proceeded to try and put him at ease and I spoke about how it is, or was going to be, my job to start and stay with awkward and difficult conversations.

So, while politics may not be an appropriate or comfortable topic for polite conversation, I don't think it can be avoided in a faithful conversation.

The politics of Jesus is different from the kind of politics most of us see, experience, and probably even practice. For Jesus' politics is driven, led, anointed, and filled by the Holy Spirit.

At its most basic, politics is concerned about the ordering of relationships. It's about the way we navigate life together. It's about people.

The very root of the word politics comes from the Latinised Greek 'polis' meaning city, and more specifically citizen. In other words, people. If in its very nature politics is about people, and we share a common humanity, then I wonder why we find it so awkward, difficult, and often divisive to talk about?

This concern about people is central to the ministry of Jesus and so also, the living out of Christian faith. We believe that God has something to say about how we live and the way we relate to one another. We open ourselves to God's ordering of our lives and relationships.

In that regard the incarnation, the embodiment of God in humanity, is a deeply profound political statement. The life of Christ is a political statement, one that should reorientate our relationship with God and with each other. It teaches and shows us a way of being, living and dwelling together.

Good news to the poor, release to the captive, sight to the blind, letting the oppressed go free, and declaring God's favour are the very building blocks of Jesus' political platform. They are not campaign promises but a present reality, a reality made present in Jesus. "Today," Jesus says, "this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

At the very heart of Jesus' politics is an unspoken and yet ever-present question:

Where does it hurt?

Where does it hurt?

We see this through a different lens in our reading from Paul's letter to the Corinthians: "If one member suffers, all suffer together with it" (v26). As the Body of Christ, the church, we are reminded what it means to be both one in Christ and one with each other. Without Christian community that works together, acknowledges pain, celebrates joy and see's each person as valuable, then we cease to affiliate ourselves with Jesus' political framework.

Paul also speaks of the manifold gifts that are contained within, and indeed beyond, Christian community. If our petty politics obstruct the vision that sees each person as absolutely necessary to the building and flourishing of God's kingdom here, then we are doing something wrong.

Of course, that doesn't mean difference of opinion is not present; but we cannot rely on our own strength, our own senses or only our own experiences to claim we know everything, see everything, hear everything, or have everything under control. When politics is truly about relationship, we must learn to trust and respect one another. Indeed, the body does not consist of one member, but of many (v14).

We are invited to participate in God's plans, in God's vision for the world. The first step in accepting that invitation is recognising that central to politics, to living well together, is relationship.

- Asking 'where does it hurt?'
- Being present.
- Listening more than we speak.
- Paying attention to power.
- Holding one another in prayer.

Having the courage to stand with another in their pain, and the vulnerability to risk letting another stand with us in our pain.

If that's the politics of Jesus, and we claim to be disciples, it needs to be our politics too.

Amen