“Let's Talk Politics”
Psalm 8; Hebrews 1:1-4; 2:5-12
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It's October. We have about a month until it is Election Day again. So let's talk politics. We do with friends and family, right. Don't you think we should talk politics in church? Or do you think we should avoid political discussions and that the church should keep to just preaching the gospel? And we certainly don't want political discussion from the pulpit, do we? But is that really possible? Is it possible to avoid getting political? Because if we avoid speaking about politics, isn't that the same as proclaiming that we like things just as they are? In the nineteenth century many Christian churches in America avoided speaking about slavery because that would have been getting political. In the 20th century, German Christians kept out of politics and didn't speak against the rise of Hitler because that was part of the worldly realm and the church was supposed to speak only to spiritual things. To not be political is to be political.

There are issues that go on in our society that Christians should be concerned about and involved in. We are called as Christians to love our neighbors. I would argue that Christians should be involved in politics because we are supposed to love our neighbors. To work for better public schools or for a cleaner environment or against racial injustice or to improve the lives of the poor are things that Christians have done for centuries and that we should continue to do. We just have to look at the words of the psalm that we read this morning, praising our Sovereign God who has created us human beings only a little lower than the angels. It then says, “You have given them dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under their feet.” That means that we look around at creation, at all the things God had made, and we are responsible for caring for them. How do we make this a better world without being involved politically? We can't. We have to be involved.

How should Christians involve themselves in politics? Well, I think we can say that God desires us to be good citizens of the places God has called us to be. That means informing ourselves of the issues,
watching the news (preferably more than one news outlet), voting when you get the chance and encouraging others to do so as well. Maybe even running for office. All of those can be expressions of our faith, of our response to God's call to love our neighbors, to be good stewards of all that God has given to us.

I think that we can also listen to the Bible. When the Scriptures speak to us about loving our neighbor and hear the parable of the Good Samaritan, we should hear that as an indictment of racism, for any racist attitudes are a violation of that command to love the neighbor and love the stranger. When we read the story in Genesis of how God put us in the Garden to keep it, to till it and care for it, when we read about the creation of the world and how we have been given responsibility for all of creation, that means that we are concerned about global warming and about plastic in the seas and lead in the water. When we hear the prophet call to the people to care for the poor, we realize that that's what we should do as well—to lift up the poor and to defend those who are oppressed are biblical imperatives. So the fact that children still struggle with hunger in America and that Muslim Rohingya are killed in Myanmar, those are concerns for us. We hear the words of Jesus in Matthew 25 as Christ's desire for us to care for each other as we would care for him, to feed the hungry, to give water to the thirsty, to clothe the naked, to visit those who are sick and in prison, to care for the stranger among us.

To do any of these things is going to involve us in politics, because effective solutions are going to have political dimensions. Now it could be that we get into trouble with one another when we assume that because our call to be good stewards is to all of us as Christians, that all Christians should have the same response. Not so. We are called to help the poor, right? What is the best way to do that? Should we raise the minimum wage to $15 for everyone in the country? Or would that make businesses reduce the number of people they can hire? Should we shrink the government and let private capital markets allocate resources, or should we expand the government and give the state more of the power to redistribute wealth? Or something in between? The Bible doesn't tell us which way is best, it just tells us to care for the world and care for each other.
Timothy Keller, wrote in a recent New York Times editorial about the church’s role in politics, “I know of a man from Mississippi who was a conservative Republican and a traditional Presbyterian. He visited the Scottish Highlands and ournd the churches there as strict and as orthodox as he had hoped. No one so much as turned on a television on a Sunday. Everyone memorized catechisms and Scripture. But one day he discovered that the Scottish Christian friends he admired were, in his view, socialists. Their understanding of government economic policy and the state's responsibilities was by his lights very left-wing, yet also grounded in their Christian convictions. He returned to the United states not more politically liberal but, in his words, “humbled and chastened.” He realized that thoughtful christians, all trying to obey God's call could reasonably appear at different places on the political spectrum, with loyalties to different political strategies.”

Christians can disagree. Christians will disagree. But maybe more than anyone else, Christians, because we are united by our love and loyalty to Jesus Christ above any political party or political figure, are called to love each other, and listen to each other.

So Christians should be involved in politics and Christians can disagree with each other about how that should look, but what about politics from the pulpit? Does this mean that the preacher can stand up in the pulpit and tell you for whom to vote. Well, he or she can, but that would be pretty dumb. Because as Presbyterians we believe in the priesthood of all believers and in the words of our Book of Order, that God alone is lord of the conscience. That means that these decisions are between you and God. I may stand up here and give opinions about what I believe God's call is for us as his people because that is my job. And it is your job to consider how that fits with your conscience and how God's Spirit is speaking to your spirit and calling you to best love your neighbors. You won't hear me telling your for whom to vote. If I'm doing my job right, you will hear me bringing up issues and concerns for our political involvement.

As the letter to the Hebrews says, we are called to have Jesus as our example and that should give us

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our final word of caution as we think about the church and politics. Politics is so often about power. Lots of us have been watching the news this week as the Senate has been debating how they will vote on the nomination of a new associate justice of the Supreme Court. There are lots of things in this debate over the last several weeks that deserve our attention, but one thing that has struck me is the consideration over how each senator was going to vote. It seems, in the minds of newspeople anyway, that the main consideration was over their own reelection chances. Could a person vote for or against and endanger their chances at being reelected? As if that were their only concern. Not whether taking a side was the right or wrong thing to do, but how did it effect one's ability to hold on to power? This is the lesson that the church should see. Because when we think about what God did to rescue us, to save us, to show his love for us, he did it not by taking power, but by coming to earth, losing glory and power, serving and dying on a cross. This meal we celebrate in his honor is about his body broken, and his blood shed. For Christians we are involved in politics, involved in the world around us, but through service, not through the accumulation of power. That temptation is out there—it was one of the temptations that Jesus faced in the wilderness. And as Jesus told the tempter, You shall worship the Lord your God and only him shall you serve.