

Jesus is political, the Church is partisan

Week of October 3, 2021

Opening Prayer:

God, we come together looking for many different things. Meet us in this moment. Where we feel anxious give us peace. Remove the distractions from our minds. Open our hearts to hear from each other and from you. We pray that our time together will bring us closer as a group and stir up our hearts to give of ourselves for others. Amen.

Historical Context:

This section explains where the passage we are about to read lives in the Bible and how it fits into the overall story of God working in our world.

In the passage below, Jesus continues to draw large crowds as he journeys toward Jerusalem. He was teaching, healing, praying, and eating with leaders, ordinary people, and those on the margins. Many of his teachings before this scripture are challenging and offer new insight for the people of God. Here, the author recounts Jesus being invited to dine with Pharisees and other Mosaic legal experts. They would have been leaders in their community, revered for their fidelity to Jewish law and customs. Even so, we read as Jesus calls out their preoccupation with external ceremonies. Jesus preaches to them about inner virtue and character.

Read Aloud:

Luke 11:37-54 (CEB)

Jesus condemns Pharisees and legal experts

37 While Jesus was speaking, a Pharisee invited him to share a meal with him, so Jesus went and took his place at the table. 38 When the Pharisee saw that Jesus didn't ritually purify his hands by washing before the meal, he was astonished.

39 The Lord said to him, "Now, you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and platter, but your insides are stuffed with greed and wickedness. 40 Foolish people! Didn't the one who made the outside also make the inside? 41 Therefore, give to those in need from the core of who you are and you will be clean all over.

42 "How terrible for you Pharisees! You give a tenth of your mint, rue, and garden herbs of all kinds, while neglecting justice and love for God. These you ought to have done without neglecting the others.

43 "How terrible for you Pharisees! You love the most prominent seats in the synagogues and respectful greetings in the marketplaces.

44 "How terrible for you! You are like unmarked graves, and people walk on them without recognizing it."

45 One of the legal experts responded, “Teacher, when you say these things, you are insulting us too.”

46 Jesus said, “How terrible for you legal experts too! You load people down with impossible burdens and you refuse to lift a single finger to help them.

47 “How terrible for you! You built memorials to the prophets, whom your ancestors killed. 48 In this way, you testify that you approve of your ancestors’ deeds. They killed the prophets, and you build memorials! 49 Therefore, God’s wisdom has said, ‘I will send prophets and apostles to them and they will harass and kill some of them.’ 50 As a result, this generation will be charged with the murder of all the prophets since the beginning of time. 51 This includes the murder of every prophet—from Abel to Zechariah—who was killed between the altar and the holy place. Yes, I’m telling you, this generation will be charged with it.

52 “How terrible for you legal experts! You snatched away the key of knowledge. You didn’t enter yourselves, and you stood in the way of those who were entering.”

53 As he left there, the legal experts and Pharisees began to resent him deeply and to ask him pointed questions about many things. 54 They plotted against him, trying to trap him in his words.

Engaging Scripture:

Let’s pause before we think about how this passage makes us feel or how it applies to our context. This section can help ground your group in talking about what is written and consider its impact on the original audience.

1. The scripture we read aloud shows Jesus in a confrontational state. He was eventually executed on political charges as he continued in this righteous anger. As he accuses the Pharisees, another legal expert shares his offense in verse 46. How do you think other people (civilians, the marginalized, Roman leaders) may have heard these accusations?
2. Throughout the Gospels, there are several occasions when Jesus does not engage in the rituals or customs of his community. Instead, he responds to the immediate needs of those around him through presence, resourcing, and prayer. What was Jesus modeling for his followers? Many were offended by his ways. How might have people felt beyond this emotion?

Application Questions:

Pastor Miosky taught that being political is concerning ourselves with public affairs. We can differentiate this from partisanship, remaining steadfast to ideology influenced by a political party. The Church has become the mouthpiece for one political party, making Christianity synonymous with partisanship. We observe something different in Jesus. His ministry was political as it was defined by teachings on inter- and intrapersonal relationships, living in community, and caring for those on the margins. As such, we can serve as his ambassadors, by following in his way, carrying out the compassion and justice we have read in Luke.

1. Have you ever experienced the pressure of partisanship from a church? How did you respond?
2. We are called to live as Jesus lived. How has this changed your political understanding or participation?
3. Luke 11 can serve as an opportunity to check our motivations and actions. Do you ever break from partisan expectations to do what is right in your community?
4. In what ways are you currently leveraging your power for those less powerful, elevating the voice of the voiceless, or living into other values of justice found in Jesus?

Closing Prayer:

God, sometimes it is hard for us to put things in the right place. We confess that sometimes we focus too much on the politics of our day and neglect the people you have called us to care for. We ask that you would help us to stand up for what is right. Help us to prioritize the things that you have taught us, to love our neighbors and to love you. Make us into the kind of people who can be a beacon of hope no matter how difficult and divided the politics around us become. We ask all of these things in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Taking it Further:

Check these out to take the heart of this series and our discussion further this week.

- Jesus Isn't Interested, by Michael F. Bird, 2019 November
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/religion/2019/11/13/jesus-isnt-interested-americas-two-party-division/>
- Google: Restorative justice and/or practices
- Biblical Justice, by BibleProject, 2017 October
 Justice
-  Casting Crowns - Courageous [Official Music Video - HD]
-  Pat Barrett – Act Justly, Love Mercy, Walk Humbly (Official Lyric Video)