



First United Church of Christ
300 Union Street
Northfield, MN 55057
507-645-7532
church@firstucc.org

Thoughts on Faith and Politics
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Todd Smith Lippert

It's almost election day. Our email boxes have been filling up with requests for funds, we've been giving thanks to God for caller id, the offensive political diatribes that are being posted on Facebook by high school acquaintances and family members are causing us to think the unthinkable: unfriending. It's time for the election to happen.

One of the topics of conversation has been how deeply Minnesota churches have been engaged in this election cycle. The Catholic church has been bankrolling the effort to pass the marriage amendment while the mainline protestant church, us, has been more active in trying to defeat this amendment than in any other state marriage amendment battle. Minnesota United for All Families has been camping out in our church, and we, like many other churches, have a banner on our building, encouraging people to vote no on the marriage amendment. There's been some question in churches and in the media about whether this advocacy on either side is what churches should be doing. It's a fair question, and it's important to think about what is true to the heart of Christianity and the faith of so many of the saints who have gone before us.

We've been reading and discussing the book *Speaking Christian* by Marcus Borg. In the book Borg points out that the historical meaning of Jesus' death on a cross is extremely important. This meaning should guide churches as we think about how we are to be engaging the issues of the day. Borg writes, "historically, Jesus didn't just die – he was killed. And killed

not by a criminal or assassin, but executed by established authority. Moreover, he was not just executed, but crucified – a form of Roman execution used for a specific class of offenders, those who systematically defied Roman authority, whether chronically rebellious slaves, or leaders of resistance movements, violent or nonviolent. That means that the authorities didn't like what they had heard about Jesus. They saw him as challenging their established authority, so they killed him in a very public way.”

Jesus died a type of death that Rome reserved for leaders of resistance movements. Jesus' death on a cross tells us that he was political. He died because he was openly opposing Roman authority. The good news he was proclaiming, the Kingdom of God, was the opposite of the Kingdom of Rome. In the Kingdom of Rome, only a few are valuable, the rest are expendable. They are to be used up as slaves who build cities for the empire or as soldiers who expanded it. If you have an illness or a disability, you were left to fend for yourself. Jesus proclaims the good news of the Kingdom of God, and in that Kingdom everyone has worth, everyone is valuable, and everyone has enough. In the Realm of God there is true peace and harmony because people are respectful of their neighbor and they are making sure everyone has enough. In the Realm of Rome, there is no peace, only a strategy to minimize resistance to their rule by keeping everyone as afraid of their overwhelming power as possible.

In our passage for today, after Jesus says the Great Commandment is to love God and love neighbor, and the scribe says to him I agree with you, interestingly, Jesus says, “ah, now you aren't far from the Kingdom of God.” This command to love the neighbor as yourself isn't only about all of the small kindnesses that we appreciate and that are important as we live together. Loving the neighbor is also about justice. If you love your neighbor you want them to have enough. You want them to have their basic needs met, you want them to be valued as full

human beings. If you love your neighbor, you also start acting in ways that make life better for them. Jesus was crucified because he was living this great commandment, and his quest for justice challenged the way Rome did things. The cross tells us what Jesus was really up to. And it tells us what we should be up to as followers of Jesus today. We should be acting so that our neighbors have what they need, including their dignity as human beings. One way we do this today is by taking our faith with us into the voting booth. Christian faith sends us to the voting booth with particular concerns: concern for the poor, concern for justice for groups that are often discriminated against, concern for the whole of God's creation, which means concern for environmental issues and climate change, which is already having a disproportionate effect on the poor in our nation and especially throughout the world. And we vote accordingly.

On All Saints Day it's helpful to remember that our Congregational ancestors have been present and working in the heart of the major justice movements of our nation's history. Congregationalists were central to the abolitionist movement. Congregationalists were early adopters and supporters of women's rights. As Congregationalists became a part of the United Church of Christ, the UCC has been involved in the gay rights movement since the beginning. In each case, loving the neighbor led to political engagement. African slaves weren't chattel but human beings. Loving the neighbor meant struggling for freedom from slavery and Jim Crow. Women weren't the weaker sex but human beings. Loving the neighbor meant struggling for women's suffrage and working towards equal rights and equal opportunity for women. Gays and lesbians weren't and aren't an abomination, but are human beings. Loving the neighbor means honoring the dignity of gays and lesbians and defending their love as real and their committed relationships as just as important as anyone else's.

As followers of Jesus we are called to take our love for neighbor out into the world. If we are following in Jesus' footsteps this means we will be engaging the authorities. We will be engaging the status quo, resisting established laws if we feel they are unjust, and we will be trying to keep harmful laws, like the marriage amendment, and the voter id amendment from being passed. Our engagement in politics is as central to Christian faith as the cross.

I don't have trouble with the fact that Catholic Archbishop John Nienstedt has engaged so aggressively in the marriage debate. I'm troubled by but not surprised by his authoritarian tactics. I simply disagree with his position. For me the whole debate hinges on whether or not we believe there is such a thing as sexual orientation. In my view the evidence for sexual orientation is overwhelming. And if we believe in sexual orientation, now we're talking about something that the Biblical writers had no concept of. There are a handful of Biblical verses that offer a prohibition against sexual activity between people of the same gender, but they don't say that homosexuality is wrong. How could they? The biblical writers don't know about homosexuality yet. The Biblical writers assume that in these instances heterosexual people are going astray. Now we realize something else is going on, that human sexuality is complex. God has created us to be heterosexual, homosexual and bisexual. This isn't about going astray, but being true to who you've been created to be. The modern question is, "what do we do now that we've figured out that God creates us to be heterosexual and homosexual and bisexual?" And fortunately, the major themes of the Bible help us answer that question. The major themes of the Bible say: treat one another with justice, love the neighbor as you love yourself.

And so then I start thinking about my love for Sara and our relationship and our marriage and what it means to be. I think about how when I fell in love with Sara I immediately wanted to get married, because that's our ultimate symbol of love and commitment. I wanted the ultimate

for our relationship, nothing less would do. If my gay and lesbian friends want to get married, to share in this ultimate expression of love and commitment, they should be free to do so. I'm also aware that I enjoy rights and privileges because I'm married. I believe gays and lesbians who choose to marry should also receive the rights and privileges from the state that we do. That's justice. If I'm loving my gay and lesbian friends and neighbors then I'm led to act.

So I'll be voting no on the marriage amendment on the 6th. I'll be voting no on both amendments, and I'll be bringing my faith into the voting booth with me. This simple act is as central to our faith as the cross. I'm proud that our church has been as engaged as we have this election, and since we strive to follow Jesus as faithfully as possible, I trust that our engagement in political matters will continue. Amen.