

Pentecost 21B 17 October 2021
Matthew 10:35-45
St Peter's Lutheran Church Elizabeth
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Grace and peace to you beloved from God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Jesus called them and said to them, "You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognise as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many." Let's pray:

Dear Saints, I have some unsavoury news that you may be unaware of. You're forgiven for not noticing it amidst the pandemic and climate change-saturated media. Brace yourselves and cover the children's ears! [In a whispered and haunted tone] It's my unpleasant duty to inform you that we're only months away from a federal election. All the jostling, positioning, campaigning, vote-buying, pork-barrelling, cabinet-reshuffling, promises, rhetoric, and accusations are ramping up. It's time to prepare for the bombardment of advertisements, baby-kissing, and sausage sizzling. Yep, that time is rapidly approaching again, where we get to vote for the candidate who we believe will do the least harm. What - too cynical? It's okay, you'll get there one day, too. Now, let me throw a spanner in the works. What if Jesus' name was on the ballot paper? Would we vote for him?

Hands up, "Yes!" Hands up, "No!" Hands up, "Cautiously non-committal..." I want to say, "Yes". At least I hope I would. But there are some sobering reminders that appeal to my cautiously non-committal position too:

- Jesus is the candidate who says that we should love God with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our strength, and with all our mind.
- Jesus is the candidate who says we should love our neighbour as ourselves.

- Jesus is the candidate who says we should love our enemies.
- Jesus is the candidate who says we should do good even to those who don't do good to us.
- Jesus is the candidate who says we should forgive not seven times but seventy times seven.
- Jesus is the candidate who says that if we have supported and cared for the least, the last, the lost, we have supported and cared for him.
- Jesus is the candidate who privileges others over himself.
- And Jesus is the only candidate who asks not only for our vote, but our life as well...

Hands up, "Yes!" Hands up, "No!" Hands up, "Cautiously non-committal..."

Would you vote for Jesus on the understanding that greatness means being a servant to others? Would you vote for Jesus, who says that being number one means being a slave of all? Would you vote for Jesus who will go and give up his life to fulfill his election promise?

Today is the third time in the last five weeks we've heard Jesus emphasise this teaching. Last week he said, "Many who are first will be last, and the last will be first" [Mark 10:31]. And three weeks before that he said, "Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all" [Mark 9:35].

Each of the synoptic gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, include this teaching because it's the thread running through Jesus' life. It defines what Jesus is all about; who he is. What about us? Is it our theme? Is it the thread that runs through our life? If so, how far does it go? Is there a limit to how far we'll follow it?

In today's gospel, Jesus is describing a reversal of fortune, a reversal most of us don't aspire to and one the world rarely teaches, rewards, or encourages. It doesn't make sense to us to become a servant to others and a slave of all.

Here's a curly question for you. Can you imagine yourself being a servant to and slave of Scott Morrison? "Mr. Morrison, what is it you want me to do for you?" Could you and I drink from that cup?

Can you imagine yourself being a servant to and slave of Anthony Albanese? “Mr. Albanese, what is it you want me to do for you?” Could you and I drink from that cup?

What does it say about us if our answer is yes to only one of them, and no to the other? What does it say about us if our answer is no to both of them? Or yes to both of them? Whatever our answer might be, it says something more about us than it does either Mr. Morrison or Mr. Albanese. It says something about where we’re at with Jesus as a candidate.

You see, we tend to vote for the candidate who promises to do the things we think should be done. The one who will do whatever we ask, who supports our beliefs, and advances our agenda the most. Isn’t that what James and John want from Jesus? “Teacher we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you ... Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.” They’re privileging themselves over others, and we often do too. Grant us. Do for us. That’s politics as usual. “But it [shall not be (*actual translation*)] so among you,” Jesus says.

Jesus isn’t about politics as usual. He privileges others over himself. “The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve.” What if that was also our politics? What if that was the campaign trail we followed?

What if we chose to privilege others over ourselves? What if, when we met others we asked, “How can I serve you? What is it you want me to do for you?” What if we looked after the well-being of others first? Imagine striving to be instruments of peace: to sow love where there is hatred, pardon where there is injury, faith where there is doubt, hope where there is despair, light where there is darkness, joy where there is sadness? What if we sought to console more than to be consoled, to understand more than to be understood, to love more than to be loved? (Adapted from the Peace Prayer of St Francis of Assisi). Then we’d be uncannily like the one who is a servant to and slave of all. That sounds exactly like Jesus.

Isn't that the kind of life you want for yourself and your loved ones? Isn't that the kind of future you want for yourselves, your children, grandchildren, great grandchildren? Isn't that your hope for Elizabeth, South Australia, the world? It's what I want and hope for. And it's also what I struggle with; how to live this, how to become this. I don't know how to do this. I don't have quick or easy answers. What I do know is that it's the only vote that will make a real or substantial difference.

In six months, the ballots will be cast, the polls will close, and the election will be over. But the voting will never be over. We vote every day, with our lives, our choices, our priorities, our words, our actions, and... Jesus.

"How will you vote?" is an important question. However, the more important consideration is, "how can we be servants to and slaves of all?" By following in Jesus' footsteps; by his strength, humility, love, grace, peace, mercy, and forgiveness. By being his called, blessed, and sent, disciples. In this, Saints, you are truly great, to the glory of God. Amen.

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.