

Sermon – 4th Easter
John 10:1-10
May 7, 2017

“To Our Leaders...An Open Letter”

To our nation’s president, our senators, members of Congress, our state’s governor and legislators, grace and peace to you in the name of Jesus Christ.

We recognize the importance as well as the difficulty of what you do as elected officials. You aspired to your positions in government, and yet we know that “*we the people of the United States of America*” can be a difficult lot to govern. However, we want you to know that we Lutheran Christians have in our tradition a teaching called “vocation”, which dares to assert that your calling is “holy” in that you are not only doing the people’s work, you are doing God’s work. Please, leaders, note that we use the word “govern” as opposed to “please.” Despite every opinion poll you may read, every focus group you may listen to, and what every ‘*talking head*’ of either the traditional or the increasingly rancorous social media may be saying – no yelling - we don’t want you to try to please us.

We want you to represent us, yes, but we want you to lead us. This is no mere patriotic sentiment by the way. We Christians take our cue from our faith - in the God whom we call “*the Good Shepherd*.” We know that popularity is a popular thing...and we regret the endless “approval ratings” that we subject you to. We should know better. Our sacred story, the story of our Lord Jesus, is filled with plenty of evidence that he was subjected to the same thing, and at various points in his term of service, particularly the end, not many approved of him.

Still, despite the fact that our Lord’s devotion to truth with justice caused him to suffer, we write to encourage you to lead as our Lord led – firmly with conviction, compassionately with humility, and, we dare hope, without compromise to the ideals of this world. We believe our Lord compels us to listen to him, and since you represent us, we long that you would too. We know you were not elected for service in the church, we don’t call you our pastor or bishop, and we do not suppose that we can invoke our Christian truths in a nation that does not hold them as self-evident as we do.

But again, we Lutherans believe that God rules in many ways, chiefly through his church by convicting us of our need for his forgiveness and grace, but no less so through those institutions that regrettably are lumped together as “secular”, like governments. We remind you, as we need to remind ourselves all the time that God did not make the distinction between “sacred” and “secular”, we humans did, and we seem to want to separate them more and more each day. We hope you will share our recognition that God cares about how people are governed, not just how they are justified in his sight, and that your calling as a public servant is as holy as any calling to serve in the church.

We do not write to influence you on the issues of the day, even though you can be sure we have our views on them. We Christians are no more of one mind politically as any other group in our nation. We have wise and good counsel in our Bibles on matters of faith and life, and yet we often invoke a passage of Scripture that reminds us that in this life we see “*as in a mirror dimly.*” We want you to heed the same good counsel, and regret that sometimes our Bible has been used like it was a political manifesto, instead of the self revelation of God for the sake of the salvation of all people. Ever since a man named Martin Luther cozied up with his prince in order to have some political cover for his ideas, we Lutherans have been struggling to know how to balance faith and politics. We write to remind ourselves as much as you that the truth is not conservative or liberal, moderate or progressive. The truth is Jesus Christ, and in adopting for ourselves positions on issues, we’ve only question we’re permitted to ask – does this reflect the mind and manner of the same Lord Jesus Christ?

That sort of soul searching goes way beyond sayings like “*what would Jesus do*”, and enters instead the far more penetrating and scary realm of “*what has God always done through history?*” The evidence we have is that while God is unquestionably the Lord, God does not “*lord it over*” those who know him but rather, even ironically, serves them. God’s number one issue is life. God gives it, always protects it and for those who know him, directs it. The Lord Jesus, whom we call “*the Good Shepherd*”, led from out front, as you have to do. We write to tell you that if you lead us and show us that you have the lives of all your constituents in mind, that justice will be defined by you as it was for our God, that you’ll show no favoritism and that blessing and sacrifice will be asked of us all in proportion to what we’ve been blessed with, we as Christians promise that we will not only follow, but “*we’ll have your back*”.

One who once led our nation as its president, Dwight D. Eisenhower said; “*In order to be a leader one must have followers. And to have followers, one must have their confidence. Hence the supreme quality of a leader is unquestionably integrity. Without it, no real success is possible...whether in an army or in an office. A leader’s teachings and actions must square with each other. The first great need, therefore, is integrity and high purpose*” That you would lead us in that manner is our highest hope, and will be our constant prayer. We trust the one who calls himself our Good Shepherd...Jesus Christ. His aims are the highest imaginable and we fall in behind him with confidence. We will do likewise for you, whenever and however your words remind us of and your actions resemble his, for to Christ alone, we’re all ears. AMEN

(Dwight D. Eisenhower, Bits & Pieces, September 15, 1994, p. 4).

