

Jesus for Prime Minister?

Jarrod McKenna

Jesus for Prime Minister? Can you imagine policies based on the New Testament? A foreign policy based on "love your enemies"? A foreign aid budget based on "love your neighbour as yourself"? How about a climate action plan animated by "God so loved all of creation that God gave the one and only Son"? Or a Refugee policy based on Jesus' words "Whatever you did to the least of these you did to me"?

Every election there's talk of faith and politics but little talk of the 'politics of Jesus'.

Maybe understandably so.

Referring to being a Christian might get votes, but, as Jesus warned, living like Christ might get you crucified. With all the trends and movements in the polls, 'taking up your cross' and risking crucifixion still equals political death (if you can excuse the pun). Abstracted Christian values can be more easily co-opted by political agendas but all who have encountered the concrete character of all four Gospels will know this guy is still dangerous to politicians, pastors and priests who have agenda's other the inclusive radical grace revealed in Jesus. This grace that early Christians actively-waited to "flood the earth like the waters cover the seas."

In this season when polities kiss more than babies in hopes of votes, it might be timely for Christians to remember the particularities of what the hymn calls "that old, old Story." Yes it's true that central to the Christian tradition is a story of the collaboration of faith leaders and politicians. What's sometimes forgotten is all four Gospels are unanimous that this collaboration between faith leaders and politicians leads to the killing of God incarnate.

As you can imagine, no small concern for those of us who love Jesus.

The early Christians would never think their political engagement happened by themselves, once every three to four years, in a cardboard box while ticking boxes. Not just because you didn't vote for Cesar in the ancient Roman Empire but because of the very different understanding of politics. A classical understanding of politics is about how a community organises itself. The 'politics' of the early church was as a community who, by grace, sort to live God's love in how they organise their life around the love revealed in Jesus.

You'll be hard pressed to find a New Testament scholar and decent first century historian who doesn't agree with N.T. Wright and Richard A. Horsley (among many others) who point out that the central claim in of the early Christians, that "Jesus is Lord", could not have been heard in terms that were *not* political! "Lord" was a term that was used for Caesar, as was "Son of God", and "Saviour". The term was used of the Roman ruler who conquered by the violence of the sword. Yet the early Christians in deliciously seditious ways used these very terms to talk of the one who conquered nonviolently with the towel of service. In doing so subverted all politics that seeks to force its agenda on others.

Recently I was speaking in the States with Shane Claiborne who shares some similar influences and he has written a fantastic book translating what it means to profess "Jesus is Lord" today called *Jesus for President*. In our context, "Jesus for Prime Minister" might be more fitting. Understandably so this may scare the bagebez out of a lot of people. It sounds 1984-style authoritarian theocracy gone mad. I agree that there are few things scarier than Christians who have lost the "foolishness of the cross" that nonviolence, non coercion, of Jesus. Jesus' revolution is not top down by force but bottom up by loving invitation.

The 'politics' of the early church were animated by an imagination that didn't see the transformation of our world was going to come about via guns and bombs, invasions or elections but through this one homeless bloke who healed and hangout with all the people politicians and religious leaders find it politic for the "fear vote" to scapegoat, alienate, and exclude. These are the people Jesus embraced. The early Christians lived and taught that the alternative to war, injustice and ecocide was *not* going to happen in the clouds with fat, winged babies playing harps. They taught that in the incarnation; the life, death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, this transformation had started, "on earth as it is in heaven".

If you think it sounds like ridiculous, you are not alone. Many Christians throughout history would agree with you. You don't have to be a church historian or know the names of Constantine or Charlemagne to know that much of 'Christian history' looks nothing like Christ. But I've been messed up by Jesus' love so much that I can't let Christianity mean something less to me than something that looks like the radical love I see in Christ. So you'll hear me singing a hearty 'amen' after hearing Martin Luther King, Jr. say:

"There are some who still find the cross a stumbling block, others consider it foolishness, but I am more convinced than ever before that it is the power of God unto social, [ecological] and individual salvation."

So will I vote this time... yes. How?

In a way where I know that I don't look for salvation from those in "Power" but from the nonviolent Messiah who went to the cross, who shows what real power is; Love which fear cannot intimidate and death cannot kill. In ways that simply sees voting as voicing what I'm trying to say with my life on a daily basis. Voting is not my voice, 'letting my life speak' is my voice. Voting is just saying one thing in one place on one day. If that's democracy, we are all stuffed. *So have your say, but don't silence yourself by outsourcing your power to politicians, when God invites us to organise our daily lives around the politics of love, the politics of grace, the politics of Jesus.*

As I by grace struggle with what it is to live like 'Jesus was Prime Minister' I'll be seeking to use my vote "for the least of these" here are the priorities for me as I've prayed and researched:

1. Climate justice (this affects the poorest of poor for generations to come)
2. Peace! Ie. and an end to war(s) as how we do security and conflict
3. Increased and more effective aid (MDG's! Esp. MATERNAL HEALTH!!! Our sisters are dying worldwide, 0.7% +, forgiveness of debt etc.)
4. Human Rights (Refugee Rights, Indigenous Rights, Civil Rights)
5. Health (esp. Mental health) & education

The Good Book says that Jesus invites us to seek first the kingdom and to seeking to love God with all that we are by loving our neighbour as ourselves. We might be able to do this while in a cardboard box and ticking boxes once every three to four years, but let's not buy into the myth this is what transforms the world. The resurrection sends a shock wave throughout all creation that "Love Wins!"

And that's something we can witness to daily.