

The Second Sunday in Easter

Year C

Saint Paul's Episcopal Church/La Iglesia Episcopal de la Resurrección

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Words: Many people disparage words and what they can cause among our species. They deny that words can cause injury, fear, violence, fracturing, or hatred- sticks and stones. Words can also cause just the opposite - compassion, empathy, uniting, and action. Think of the word politics, a certain third rail word in the church, despite the fact that we have just come through one season, Lent, that tells God's working among humans, the politics involved, and into another season, Easter, the continuation of that story.

At its simplest, politics happens when two people come together. More verbosely, politics can be seen as "the assumptions or principles relating to or inherent in a sphere, theory, or thing, especially when concerned with power and status in a society:" *the politics of the church*. (New Oxford American Dictionary). In other words, how are we going to live together?

In many ways, politics expresses how humans deal with the values of abundance and scarcity. In Genesis 1, we hear about God's generosity and unlimited abundance as God keeps saying, "It is good, it is good, it is good," and finally, "It is very good."

This celebration of abundance continues in Genesis until chapter 47, when Pharaoh has a nightmare about a famine in the land and Pharaoh, with Joseph's help, organizes and monopolizes the food supply. Pharaoh and his cohort introduce the principle of scarcity into the system. According to Walther Brueggemann, for the first time, the Bible has someone say, “There is not enough. Let’s get everything.”

God has a thing about kings and sends Samuel to warn the people that in demanding kings, they are rejecting God, and the king will take their sons and daughters and make soldiers and workers out of them. Kings would also take their fields and vineyards; if they were not the best, they would finally be enslaved. And the very rich, as spoken by Mary and reflecting the words of Hannah in 1 Samuel:

God has mercy on those who fear God *
in every generation.
God has shown the strength of God's arm, *
God has scattered the proud in their conceit.
God has cast down the mighty from their thrones, *
and has lifted up the lowly.
God has filled the hungry with good things, *
and the rich God has sent away empty.

Kings, autocrats, tyrants, and demagogues fear that they will never have enough to control, so they disparage what they cannot have. In their fear, they become ruthless. As we have been

raised in a society and economy driven by consumerism, we have also bought into the fear of scarcity, that we can never have enough.

We are currently being told over and over by our leaders and media that the wealthiest nation on earth, with what was the strongest economy in the world, has been and is being taken advantage of and scammed by all the other nations of the world. That we have been suckers and losers with our compassion and generosity. We are losing our monopoly and control. We will not have enough!

Yet there is an answer to this in the commandments and lessons in the Bible. The most frequent commandment in the Bible, word search, is some version of 'do not be afraid.' It shows up, in some way, in every book of the Bible, except the Song of Solomon, which is a love poem.

In today's reading from Acts, Peter and the apostles encountered the same political fear and lack of imagination—the same fears and responses that brought Jesus to the cross. It is not the Jews, as in the entire population, but the high priest and probably his council of advisors, made up primarily of the Sadducees. Peter's mission, dissemination of the gospel—a mission that affords him a joyful and resilient attitude, "We must obey God rather than any human authority," contrasts with that of the high priest, primarily keeping the Romans happy and protecting his power

and privilege. The high priest and his crew are the officials of faith and do not take kindly to possible usurpers.

In Matthew 6:24, Jesus gives what could qualify as the ultimate anti-consumerism command: “No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.” And then he says, “Don't be anxious, because everything you need will be given to you.” But you must decide. Christians have a long history of trying to put God and Jesus in a box where we have power and control and will not be embarrassed or inconvenienced. But to do this is to ignore what the Bible says. Jesus talks a great deal about the kingdom of God, loving God, neighbor, and self, and the role of his followers in disseminating that message to the world. “As the Father has sent me, so I send you.”

It is much easier to talk about these things than to live them. It is much easier to claim a personal relationship with Jesus than to consider a call for diversity, equity, and inclusion, more ‘words’ that have been undergoing what linguists call *pejoration*, by which a positive or neutral word takes on a negative meaning. It is not only politics but also economics, as Brueggemann puts it, “Our world absolutely requires this news. It has nothing to do with being Republicans or Democrats, liberals or conservatives, socialists or capitalists. It is much more elemental: the creation is infused with the Creator's generosity, and we can find practices, procedures and institutions that allow that generosity to work.

Like the rich young man in Mark 10, we all have many possessions. Sharing our abundance may, as Jesus says, be impossible for mortals, but nothing is impossible for God. None of us knows what risks God's spirit may empower us to take. Our faith, ministry, and hopes are that the Creator will empower us to trust his generosity, so that bread may abound.”

All we have to do is listen, pay attention, not be afraid, and then respond.

“As the Father has sent me, so I send you!”

The Liturgy of Abundance, the Myth of Scarcity
by Walter Brueggemann in the March 24, 1999, The Christian
Century