

“Politics and Prose”

by Rich Brown

Sunday, September 1, 2019

Good morning

When I was asked to deliver the message for today I came up with this great idea of talking about something I'm very interested in and involved with...politics.

This is where you are as a group are supposed to moan and roll your eyes.

Well that great idea I have to admit was something I found very difficult to put down on paper and to make it relatable to a worship service.

Now I think I've told you this before but I really believe politicians are very under appreciated.

After all, let's look at the word politics itself. It comes from the ancient Greek language where poli means many and tics are little blood sucking insects.

Truthfully, since I became the Moderator of this church the mixture of politics and religion in a church service probably has been the complaint I've heard from members of this congregation more than any other thing.

I have a different outlook on it and it may be totally opposite of your beliefs but I think it's perfectly fine to have differing opinions and to be able to discuss those opinions in an open and friendly manner...even though I'm right and you aren't.

To get an understanding of where I'm coming from, let me tell you about my journey to where I am today.

In high school I could've been best described as a conservative Republican.

My first presidential vote was Gerald Ford and I voted twice for Ronald Reagan. It was unusual, because my family was mostly nonpolitical and I came from a county that hadn't elected a Republican officeholder since Herbert Hoover.

As I got older my political views began to change and I became what could best be described as a moderate democrat and was elected County Clerk/Register of Deeds in my home county four times as a democrat.

When I ran for State Representative in 2000 I knew that my district while, moderately liberal on most economic issues was more conservative when it came to social issues and the second amendment.

I am not proud to say but I conformed to the beliefs of the people I wanted to represent.

I was endorsed by Michigan Right to Life, got an A rating from the NRA, although my history with the NRA took a lot of different turns during my time in the legislature which I won't bore you with right now.

When I got to Lansing I was considered a moderate if not conservative Democrat.

However, as I served at the State Capitol my views began to change again.

I was troubled by my colleagues on both side of the aisle who spoke out strongly against abortion but at the same time voted to cut funding for programs to insure children or to assist poor single mothers.

Too often I heard the poor referred to as lazy or freeloaders.

A real eye opening moment occurred for me in my second term when we voted on a measure to bring back the death penalty in Michigan. Based on the conservative nature of my district I voted for the bill. About two weeks later I was at a conference in Marquette and ran into an old fiend Monsignor Cappelletti of the Catholic Diocese of Marquette. I knew Monsignor Cappelletti because his first parish as a priest had been in my hometown of Wakefield. Monsignor Cappelletti pulled me aside and asked me why on earth I voted for the death penalty bill. I was shocked and then he said Rich, either you are prolife or you aren't. Being prolife means loving and protecting and cherishing all life and we as Christians don't hold the right to decide when it ends, that's in God's domain.

The next watershed moment came when we were asked to vote to place a ban on stem cell research on the statewide ballot.

Some of you may already know this but both of my children have Type1 Juvenile Diabetes and are insulin dependent. Every one of the doctors who cared for them had the same optimistic outlook that great advances toward finding a cure were being made every day due largely to the amazing work being done in stem cell research.

Wasn't it being prolife to allow research to continue that could not only improve the life of my children but also for millions of people worldwide? I didn't vote for the bill which pretty much ended my affiliation with Michigan Right to Life.

After I left the legislature I really began reexamining what I truly believed in and I began to accept my sexuality.

Had I pretty much always know I was gay, yes pretty much, but once again I had conformed to what the people around me believed, that it was against God's will and that I should be straight, get married have a family a live a "normal" life.

I was pretty much turned off by the whole religion thing in general until I came here, to this church.

It was here that I really began to understand the true meaning of those initial WWJD what would Jesus do

Would Jesus refer to the poor as lazy or freeloaders, no he would care for them and feed them

Would Jesus demean and frighten the immigrants seeking refuge. No he would welcome them and keep them safe.

Would Jesus be okay with children placed in cages? No Jesus loved all children and called them to his side.

Would Jesus be comfortable with plans to send people from other countries, who are here getting lifesaving medical treatment, back home to the country they are from where that care might not be available? Actually, I'm sure Jesus would heal the sick and care for them.

Would Jesus just offer thoughts and prayers as children, high school and college students, church members, shoppers and concert goers are killed in large numbers. No, I think he would fight to bring an end to this senseless violence.

So I'm sure I've upset some here today by mixing religion and politics and I apologize if I have.

I can serve one more term as Moderator and I expect that after today I might face a primary election challenge for the position.

But I guess I question if I really mixing religion and politics?

My point is this, don't so many things happening in our world today fly in the face of what Jesus taught us. As a Christian, as a follower of Jesus, shouldn't we be speaking out against injustice that we see happening and try to stop it.

Yes, my political beliefs are pretty left leaning and I admit it, but in my opinion so many issues in the world today aren't Republican issues or Democratic issues I believe they are human issues.

Last time I spoke before you I mentioned that one of the reason's I come here is to get my batteries recharged by the members of this amazing congregation and the messages from the pulpit and the beautiful music I hear.

Getting a good dose of WWJD help me muster up the strength to face another week and hopefully fighting for what is right in God's eyes.