



A Note from the Pastor's Corner

The 'game' of politics has always been a dirty enterprise. All at the same time, it can be interesting, frustrating, dishonest, corrupt, dismissive, arrogant, power-seeking, corrupt – oh, I already mentioned corrupt, didn't I. It does bear emphasizing, though. The corrupting power of money – bushels of it – has been unleashed by the recent Supreme Court decision oddly known as *Citizens United* that essentially gave corporations free reign to pump as much money as they want in an attempt to influence the election process. They just are not allowed to give it directly to a candidate.

I won't get into the reasoning behind it – or lack thereof – nor will I speak to the wisdom or intelligence involved in the claim that corporations are persons. But what I do want to point out is that struggle between the powerful and the powerless, between the haves and the have-nots, between the "winners" and the "losers" is becoming difficult to contain.

In an effort to convince us and our neighbors that the few who are benefitting from the *status quo* of our economic system are just regular folk and we should be happy for them, euphemisms such as 'job creators', 'successful people', 'hard-working producers' and the like have come and gone, some of them barely sticking around long enough to make the nightly news.

If you were in our sanctuary on January 22nd, you heard me mention the prophet Amos and his words of warning to the Kingdom of Israel shortly before they were overrun by the Assyrians in 722 BCE. I mentioned that, although there can be strong parallels drawn between the social-religious situation of his day and what we see in our own nation, that we cannot say that the words of Amos apply to us. His warning to the Northern Kingdom are not words of warning to us. At least, not yet.

Our prophet is Martin Luther King, Jr. So far, God has not raised up another prophet in our nation to bring us a different message. King's message from God was not one of warning but one of instruction, of encouragement, and of hope. So far, in the grand scheme of things, I believe we are heading in the right direction.

Or, at least we have been.

The oppression of our African-American sisters and brothers is not as severe as it once was. The overt disregard for people with dark skin is not as visible in everyday life as it was in MLK's day. Although it still exists in our society, it seems to be slowly disappearing.

But in recent years we've seen the rise of a different kind of oppression. Yes, those being blatantly disregarded includes our brown and black neighbors. And, yes, it would be difficult to argue that racist attitudes are not involved. But there's more than that. Something, deeper, darker, and more sinister than the rejection of a group identified by their external characteristics is saturating our nation: the corrupting influence of wealth and power.

Wealth and power have always been used to bend and contort our system to benefit the haves. As long as the have-nots were relatively few in number and there were enough who believed they would be able to "succeed" it went by largely unnoticed.

But today, many are being left by the wayside. About 50% of Americans (plus or minus) are now living below the poverty line and actually owe no income taxes. This is different from corporations like Verizon, General Electric, and the oil industry who earn billions in profits and pay no federal income tax. Some of them have even received income tax rebates.

This is *not* a political issue. It is not an economic issue. It's not even a social issue. It is a *spiritual* issue. And the fact that it's happening before our very eyes should set off alarm bells in every house of worship in our nation. But, while the established institutions of religion have mostly been distracted with hot-button topics like abortion and gay rights, the stage was being set for the wealth of our nation to be concentrated into very few hands. Meanwhile, millions upon millions have been losing jobs, health, and home. Many are being driven into the homes of friends and family just to survive, and those unfortunate enough to not have such support are in cars or shelters. Or worse.

One thing the Bible teaches us is that God is slow to anger. It took 400 years before God acted to free the Hebrew slaves in Egypt. It took several generations of oppression in Israel – and, later, in Judah – before God allowed those kingdoms to be overrun and their leaders carted off into exile. God is on the side of the oppressed people. God gives preferential treatment to those who are powerless to act on their own behalf. Those who read their Bible know this to be true.

Do our leaders realize they may be tempting God to act? Are they knowingly calling God's bluff? Do they believe God is pleased with what they are creating?

I believe it's up to us, the Church, to speak clearly to the seats of power and tell them of our concern for the oppressed.

Grace and peace, Pastor Bud