

In the first century of the common era, Rome was making its empiric presence known. In exchange for protection and modern services of the time, leaders of nations would agree to pay the empire portions of their wealth. Israel was no different. Herod kept his position and all the perks that went with it by paying off the Roman authorities with the taxes collected from the citizens of his country.

What made this arrangement so grievous was that in order to pay the taxes, the land worked by the people, which wasn't owned by the people, could be held as collateral. If the harvest was bad, or the people couldn't pay for any reason, the land was taken from them. No land – no means of income. The gap between the haves and the have nots grew and grew and grew.

Making matters worse, the Temple authorities were in bed with the Romans. To keep the peace, the Temple authorities also paid taxes to Rome. To collect these funds, the system of buying and selling sacrificial animals and the exchange of currency was established.

The people caught in the corruption wanted someone to lead them out of this slavery. Desperately.

Enter the rabbi from Nazareth.

Over the previous three years, Jesus had been a rural teacher. He rarely visited large cities. The crowds came to hear his message of love and hope for the future. They came to experience the healing he offered. They came because he welcomed everyone to hear his message: God loves you. There is a better way.

However, Jesus did a few things that rubbed people the wrong way. The people were the local synagogue leaders and the Temple authorities.

The rub was that he wasn't averse to bending the rules. He healed people on the Sabbath. He called a woman with a flow of blood "daughter". He broke bread with dreaded tax collectors. He talked with Samaritan women at wells. He told the "in crowd" that prostitutes would get into heaven before they did. Jesus regularly stirred the pot.

Then there were the people who rubbed him the wrong way: The tax collectors who forced more money out of the impoverished people of the land for their own selfish needs; the temple authorities who extracted their take of the vendors' income outside; the Pharisees and scribes who insisted on following the rules despite the fact those rules no longer benefitted the common good.

And, so, these politicians come to a final showdown on a day in Jerusalem. On one side of the city, the Romans march in to make clear their authority. On the opposite side of the city, a group of people tired of being oppressed, march to communicate their frustration. The prelate from Rome on one side; the rabbi from Jerusalem on the other.

The straw that breaks the colt's back is that the crowd calls Jesus "King" and Jesus doesn't stop them. The Pharisees tried and were rebuffed.

Everyone knows that Caesar is the Emperor; Caesar is King; Caesar is Lord.

Everyone knows that the Romans consider Caesar the "son of god". Proclaiming Jesus to be "King" is nothing less than treason to the Romans.

Treasonous behavior is trouble for Herod and the Temple Authorities. No wonder the Pharisees try to shut down the palm-waving crowd. Jesus doesn't stop his plan. He will use nonviolence to plead the cause of the people being treated unjustly. The poor peoples' protest march continues into the city.

The consequences of this palm-filled, clothing-strewed action will be played out over the next week, with Jesus forfeiting his life and his disciples thrown into despair and disarray.

What do we learn about politics and Christianity this day?

Jesus was not partisan, but he was most certainly political.

Christians are political through and through. To live into our baptism means that we proclaim Christ as Lord and strive to live into life governed by our baptismal vows: to break bread together, to forgive each other, to share our faith, to acknowledge and serve Christ in all people, to respect the dignity of every human being.

Politics has veered far from people working together for the good of the City. Today, politicians are locked into partisan endeavors and have forgotten how to discuss their differences in a civil way. We Episcopalians should see this as an opportunity to reclaim the practice of politics.

With Jesus as our teacher and ideal, we citizens of the City of God must tell the truth to power, remember the poor and those in need, protest injustice, work for the common good. We do this by listening to each other, caring for each other, and considering differing opinions as having an element of truth that needs to be discovered. It's politics. Just. Politics.

---

Information used in this sermon comes from Wikipedia and the first chapter of the book *The Last Week* by Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan.