

Kingdom Allegiance: Faithfulness To Jesus In Our Political Age

We begin a new series that we've entitled Kingdom Allegiance: Faithfulness to Jesus in Our Political Age. We're going to talk about this for the next three weeks. Let me offer three disclaimers. The first disclaimer is that in a few months, many of you will vote for Donald Trump. Many others of you will vote for Kamala Harris. Others of you will abstain, and others will vote independent. But hear me clearly: whoever you vote for, you are so welcome in this place. None of that precludes any of the fellowships that we hold. I imagine there are some of you in here wondering how someone could vote for that person. I want to assure you that we all are welcome here.

Elections are emotionally charged, but we are called to be something different in this world. And that leads to my second disclaimer, which is that the Church of Jesus Christ is not found anywhere along a familiar political left or political right spectrum. It is not centrist; it is not left nor right, but rather, the Church of Jesus Christ is called to be a species of its own kind. That was a phrase I took from someone as I was studying this week. The Church of Jesus Christ is called to be a species of its own kind that confounds both the left, the right, and the center. It is something altogether different, a different creation that transcends our political dialogue.

Lastly, I know many of you will have questions that you may be frustrated with. Such as the way I word things or say something different. And I want to provide you with an outlet for that. You can email me. My email is ksneed@cpc.org. So feel free to shoot all the emails over there. My hope in these next three weeks is to do my absolute best to humbly offer a few pastoral reflections on how we might follow Jesus through this particular season. I believe God is gracious, and our ultimate goal, all of us together, is how we follow Jesus in this time.

So to begin with, the 19th-century author and philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote, "That which dominates our imaginations and our thoughts will determine our lives and our character. Therefore, it behooves us to be careful what we worship, for what we are worshipping we are becoming" (Emerson). To be human is to worship. It's a concept that we talk a lot about. We talk about how to be human is to be a creature that has faith in something that gives direction and structure to our lives.

My question this morning is, what happens when we begin to worship something other than God? What happens when we worship those things that are not meant to be worshiped? Well, according to nearly every metric available, our society has never been more divided by politics since the Civil War.

Just yesterday, I was reading a journal article from 2015 by two researchers out of Stanford University entitled "Fear and Loathing Across

Party Lines." The article demonstrates that polarization has grown exponentially in recent history. I don't think that will surprise you. But what's been more alarming is they demonstrate that it is more ingrained and entrenched within us, seeping into our subconscious in a way where our natural responses to situations are now more shaped by our partisanship than any other factor.

This driving of our political imaginations and our partisanship is even moving beyond just the political arena and into everyday decisions. One example they wrote about was marital selection. Who you marry or don't marry is now based on partisanship, and it exceeds the selection based on physical or personality attributes. People are more interested in who you're voting for than what you look like or the personality you have. In 2019, author David Zahl wrote a book called *Seculosity*, which is the term referencing how, in the secular world, we lessen or drain the concept of God in our world, and what fills that void is quasi-religions.

He talks about parenting, technology, food, and career. All of those things in the modern world take on a quasi-religious character. And, of course, he also speaks about politics. He notes that in the late 1950s when American parents were asked how they would feel if their child were to marry someone from another political party, fewer than 10 percent indicated it would be a problem for them. In 2010, that number more than quadrupled to roughly 40 percent. I couldn't track down the data, but it's probably okay to speculate that it has only increased since 2010. Zahl writes,

Politics is well on its way to becoming the most entrenched and impermeable social divide in America, surpassing religion, income bracket, and even race." With each passing year, we retreat further into our ideological echo chambers. With the possible exception of career, politics has become today's most popular replacement religion. David Zahl

It behooves us to be careful what we worship, for what we worship, we are becoming. Historically, the church has called these sorts of quasi-religious idols. In the ancient world, they would show up like a golden calf or a graven image. In the modern world, though, we seem to think we've moved beyond that, and so our idols crop up in more subtle ways. But the truth of idols is they always over promise and under deliver.

They can promise because they're built on some fraction of the truth, some fraction of good. After all, politics is a good and necessary part of life. Politics has had a bad history of late, and become a dirty word. It's been associated with power plays and abuses of power, and all that may be rightly so, but at its core, politics is simply how a group of people work together for the well-being of its community through the

distribution of scarce resources. The reason we have street signs and lights and all of that is from politics.

But, as we've noted, as the world further secularizes, meaning relegates God to one aspect of the world, and what inevitably rises in its place is the political religion. Something that has to fill that vacuum because you and I are made to worship. Therefore, if we don't have a traditional understanding of who to worship, a god, something will fill that vacuum. Politics is seemingly taking that place as a quasi-religion.

Once upon a time, we looked to politics primarily for governance, but we now look to it for belonging, righteousness, and even deliverance. In other words, these were all the things we once found in religion. We've transferred it to something lesser. And as much as I want this political idolatry issue to be outside the church, my concern as a pastor is that it's seeped into the church. I recognize that for followers of Jesus, like myself, we are no less susceptible to this shifting political age.

So, the question that drives this series is how do we remain faithful to the way of Jesus in our political age? That's the question I want to spend three weeks on. I don't want to tell you how to vote. But what I am concerned about as a pastor of this church is how we remain faithful to the way of Jesus in this political age. We are going to look at John 6.

Jesus is with a large crowd who have come to hear his teachings, and he begins to recognize the crowd is getting hungry, and so he miraculously feeds 5,000 people who are before him. This miraculous sign drew the attention of the crowd. John 6:14-15 says,

After the people saw the sign Jesus performed, they began to say, "Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world." Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself. John 6:14-15

The crowd saw this sign, and it triggered all the hopes that they had built from so many centuries ago from the prophets, who said that someone would come, the Messiah, the one that God raises up to establish the kingdom of God into the world. They see this sign and they think that he must be the one. This must be it.

Now, their vision of the king, as we'll see in a second, was something quite different than the king that Jesus actually was. The nationalistic zeal and fervor was at a fever pitch within the Jews. The people of God, at this point in the story, are an occupied people. They are living in a land that's occupied by Rome, who is ruling through oppression and brute force. Yet they were living with this promise that one day God would set things right.

They were living under things like high taxation. It's estimated that their taxes were around 50 percent. Others would say it would go as far as 80 to 90 percent when you layer on the temple tax and corruption that were going on at this time. People were losing their generationally held land to this occupation. On top of that, they saw no way out. They were a small fraction in the corner of this mighty empire.

So when Jesus comes on the scene, it triggers all the zeal that's running through them. They thought that maybe this was the one, that king, but their vision was not one that was like Jesus, but rather someone who would overthrow the powers that be and would establish the Jews in Israel as the kingdom of God they desired right here on earth.

What he sees here is this concept of the king being thrust onto him. He withdraws from the crowd because Jesus understands that he will, in fact, be king, but his definition of kingship will look radically different and will take not the shape of a throne but that of a cross. Therefore, his kingdom often does not look like a success, but according to the world, it's actually foolishness. It looks much more like failure, like death, and his followers were not ready for that. They wanted a king like all the other nations. You see that throughout the Old Testament where they long to be like the other nations. But Israel, God's people, were meant to be distinct, different from every other culture in the world, the species of its own kind that confounded the world around it. They're constantly saying, "God, give us a king like all the other nations."

Commentator Leon Morris says about this moment: "He who is already king has come to open his kingdom to men, but in their blindness, men try to force him to be the king they want. Thus, they failed to get the king they wanted and also lost the kingdom he offered." It's a haunting thought. In our distorted attempts to find hope in political leaders, we could very well distort Jesus and maybe even lose out on the experience of God here and now.

Well, it's immediately from this story that Jesus, after feeding the 5,000, withdraws away from those crowds, and goes down to the sea and begins to walk on water. He's trying to, in some ways, get away from this crowd and meet up with his disciples. The storm hits. His disciples are out on the boat, worried about their lives. Jesus just marches out on top of the water right to them. When he does this, they take him in, and you have this whole exchange with Peter, which is beautiful.

Eventually, they get to the other side of the lake, and who's there, but the crowd. The crowd that wanted to make him king so badly. They chased him all the way around the lake. I'm going to go out on a limb and suggest they didn't walk across the water. They were probably moving pretty quickly. And so they run to the other side, and when they get there, they say, "Rabbi, when did you get here?" I love that they don't ask how, which was the question I'd ask. Like, we were moving quickly. Did you take a shortcut? Hey, are you that Messiah? And they demand a sign.

"Then Jesus declared, 'I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.'" (v. 35). That sign that they had in the Old Testament, it's not that manna came from Moses, it came from the Father who sent manna down. And he said that in the same way that God sent that manna to you, God has sent Jesus to us. He is the bread of life. Whoever comes to him will not grow hungry. Whoever believes in him will never be thirsty. Jesus is identifying the ache and the hunger within them. And he says they missed the point.

This answer challenges their conceptions of what they are actually hungry and thirsty for but it doesn't satisfy because Jesus often doesn't

satisfy those who are hungry for revolution. He's a different king; it's a different kingdom. How could Jesus make that audacious claim that he is life? Jesus surely couldn't have been the Messiah. The crowd was like, "No, you have to be the one." Jesus presents an alternative vision of what the kingdom of God is. The Jews begin to argue and grumble about Jesus' answer. They question his motives, and Jesus challenges their motives.

Jesus said to them, "Very truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them. Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your ancestors ate manna and died, but whoever feeds on this bread will live forever." John 6:53-58

The scene is a large crowd. The influence of Jesus in this opportunity is quite high. He could sway the whole crowd. This could be the moment in which he declares the king he is. He does! If you are his disciples, you might think, "Really, Jesus, eat my flesh and drink my blood. That's the message!" Jesus certainly has the Passover feast in mind.

We talked a little bit about this in Exodus as well, in which Jesus is that Passover Lamb in that we are covered and saved only by the blood of Jesus. And so certainly Jesus has that in mind, and he's saying, whoever eats my flesh, takes me and consumes me, places me at the very core of what it means to follow Jesus, they are the ones who have eternal life. There's a longing within all of us for eternal life, for something that transcends the here and now and all of these replacement religions we pursue, whether it's politics, parenting, career, or pleasure, you are searching for eternal life, for that which God has placed in our hearts.

"He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart; yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end" (Ecclesiastes 3:11). As C. S. Lewis wrote, "If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world." Could it be that when Jesus delivers this text, whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood, they are the ones who have eternal life, Jesus was speaking in a metaphoric sense? But in some ways not, of saying take in the very life that I hold, take in the very teachings, be baptized into my way, which is counter to all the other ways. Jesus is asserting that if you want to find eternal life, you must take into your life the very heart and nature of who he is. So how did the crowd respond to this?

On hearing it, many of his disciples said, "This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?" Aware that his disciples were grumbling about this, Jesus said to them, "Does this offend you? Then what if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before! The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you—they are full of

the Spirit and life. Yet there are some of you who do not believe." For Jesus had known from the beginning which of them did not believe and who would betray him. He went on to say, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled them." John 6:60-65

Jesus responds with this challenge. He says, "Does this offend you?" He knew some of them were going to leave, but he didn't skirt the difficult teaching. He leans into it. *"From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him" (v. 66).* I'd like to think these issues are out there for other people. But often, Jesus' teaching is directly aimed at those who would say they are followers of him. And when this teaching was given, many of the disciples turned back and left. Church, may we be humble enough to suggest or hold that we, too, may be as susceptible to drifting from the teachings of Jesus.

"You do not want to leave too, do you?" Jesus asked the Twelve" (v. 67). I love this verse, not because of its sentiment, but because the humanity of Jesus just floods this text. He's there in this moment. He's watching disciples, people who've tried to follow him leave when he gets to the very core of his teaching. And he looks at the 12 and in a moment of vulnerability, he simply says, "You don't want to leave to do you." It's the question he's asking us right now.

"Simon Peter answered him, 'Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God'" (vv. 68-69). What a beautiful declaration from Peter. In the midst of this moment, when people are leaving and fleeing, the difficult teaching is brought to the crowds. Peter, who we know will fail and deny Jesus later on in the story. But here he says, "Lord, to whom shall we go?"

Can we, in all honesty, make the same declaration as Peter? Can we say, if we're honest with ourselves, "To whom shall we go? Jesus, you hold the words of eternal life." For Peter, what he had come across in following Jesus is that Jesus is a different king than he desired. And you'll watch his struggle where he has the same vision and desire to say, "This is the Messiah I want, but then I know Jesus, and he's different than that." You'll watch him flounder in that.

But there's a moment of honesty that breaks through here. One that is exemplary for us. To whom shall we go? Peter had found that Jesus is, in fact, the Holy One of God who held the words of eternal life. But for the crowds and the disciples present, they were unable to make that same declaration. They were confronted with the reality that their hopes were not currently in Jesus, but they were in some other personal agenda and hope that they had. Jesus brought them to the point of decision about where their ultimate hope lies and they left.

How do we remain faithful to Jesus in a political age? All of us are pursuing eternal life, and the messages we are bombarded with over and over and over, whether it's from politicians or from your boss or from career success or from advertisements, whatever it is, are offering and promising eternal life. Jesus is here, and he's asking us, "Do you want to leave?"

A secular world is trying to move beyond the concepts of God. When I say secular, I don't mean that pejoratively. I just mean the world that isn't the church. I'm using it in a quite gracious sense. The world that doesn't call themselves the church is what I mean by that. In a secular world that's trying to move beyond the concepts of God, it never really can because we're created for eternal life.

So when you remove that divine goal that you're moving towards, you inevitably replace it with something. That's the vacuum we talked about earlier. So this is the problem that we find. We then exchange it with what Tim Keller called counterfeit gods.

Ernest Becker wrote that in a society that's lost the reality of God, many people will look to romantic love to give them the fulfillment they once found in religious experiences. Nietzsche, however, believed it would be money that would replace God. But there is another candidate to fill this spiritual vacuum. We can also look to politics. We can look upon our political leaders as 'messiahs,' our political policies as saving doctrine, and turn our political activism into a kind of religion. Keller, *Counterfeit Gods*

See, it's prophetic because all of us sense this shift in which we're no longer just looking at politics as a secondary good. It is good, something to order the common life, but rather we're putting the weight on it that we used to give to God in following Jesus. We're finding meaning, liberation, and all these things that are temporary second-order goods. It's good to be involved in that.

It's a gift and an honor that we have a system of government in which we can actually participate, but often it gets out of order. The political always pulls towards the ultimate. It will always want to take up, in a secular world, the position of God because it's trying to satisfy and lure us in to view it also as its highest good.

My concern, as a pastor, is that we have succumbed to the same fate of the culture. That in some way, we've drifted like that crowd and those disciples on that day in John 6, who heard the teaching of Jesus and said it was just too hard. They said, "Jesus, I don't trust that you actually have the words of eternal life." My concern is that we are not able to make the declaration, "To whom shall we go? You hold the words of eternal life." I fear that I, in good faith, can't always say that. I search elsewhere, and I get caught up in idolatry and believe the myth that these other counterfeit gods will hold the words of eternal life.

Because to confess with Peter that Jesus holds the words of eternal life is to confess that Jesus alone is Lord. To say it is easy, but it's not always about what we say. Jesus would teach, "*Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven*" (Matthew 7:21). Because to confess that Jesus is Lord is also to confess that Caesar is not Lord, Donald Trump is not Lord, Kamala Harris is not Lord, the Republican party is not Lord, and the Democratic party is not Lord. That states the obvious, as most of us have not fallen that far down the rabbit hole in which we would be in danger of confessing any of those things.

The harder statement isn't that we would confess politics outright as Lord, but maybe it's more so that we would look to them as having the words of eternal life. As humans, we're seeking for ways to fill that void. And this idolatry seeps in more insidious, subtle ways, not in maybe verbal commands or declarations, but rather in the ways in which we order our hope; we aim them at these lesser things.

To confess that Jesus is Lord is to place your allegiance, which is another way of translating faith, in him and the world that he has come to inaugurate, the new creation, the new age, burst right here in this moment. To confess Jesus is Lord is to be baptized into that reality of the kingdom of God here and now, which means we must unlearn the patterns and the habits of rival kingdoms of gods and step into this brand new reality.

What scared me this whole week is that my own heart tends to be bent towards these other rival kingdoms. I worry that, like many of us, I, too, can be caught in that crowd and disciples who hear the teaching of Jesus and walk in the other direction. So how do you know if you're caught in this political idolatry, or how do you know if you're seeking other sources of eternal life?

I want to offer four signifiers that can show up in your life and point you toward faithfulness to Jesus in our political age. These are my own speculations. I'm distancing myself, but I stand on good ground here that these four things might be emblematic of those who are trying and struggling to be faithful to Jesus.

If we are to be faithful to the way of Jesus, we will not be paralyzed by fear.

When we center a political agenda or a politician as an idol, over time, we come to depend on it. We find meaning, belonging, purpose, liberation, all those things we talked about before. And so when that is threatened in any way, panic begins to set in, and our political climate thrives off fear and anger. It's the currency of a hostile world. It's the way in which they grab hold of our attention. It's what stimulates passion and evokes a response, and the threat of the other takes on more than just disagreement but moves into an existential threat.

This shows up in our increased language around elections when both sides talk openly about how this is the end of democracy or the end of the world. It is inflammatory and not rooted in reality. But notice I didn't say that you won't experience fear. I specifically chose the adjective paralyzed by fear because I also want to recognize that elections have consequences, very real consequences in which lives are impacted. Different policy decisions do impact people.

So it's not that you won't experience fear. I can validate that. Of course, that's going to come with it, but you are not paralyzed by it. Fear should never be the controlling state of the Christian because we live in the reality of God's good world. So don't feel guilt around fear, but rather recognize that as an invitation to trust, to lean into who God is, and that the kingdom of God is, in fact, here and now, and fear is unnecessary.

The truth is, come the first Wednesday of November, some of you will be greatly relieved at who was elected, and others of you will be greatly

grieved. That is true. But no matter who gets elected, the church of Jesus Christ will still stand. The church of Jesus Christ has endured all kinds of leaders throughout its 2000 years, and the history of the church demonstrates that the church has also been faithful through all sorts of empires and leaders. We don't have to worry about the church, the future of the church, because God said the very gates of hell will not stand against it.

It was the missiologist Lesslie Newbigin who said, "I am neither an optimist nor a pessimist; Jesus Christ has risen from the dead." If I could tweak that a little bit: I am neither a Republican nor a Democrat; Jesus Christ is risen from the dead. If Jesus Christ has risen from the dead, there's a new reality right here in the midst of this world. As Christians, we are learning as disciples to live more and more into that reality, a reality that confounds all aspects of this world.

But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own. Matthew 6:33-34

To be paralyzed by fear is to be caught up in the unknown of the future. In some ways, it's an effort to grab control. Fear is often an indicator that's trying to help you know something. There's some dissonance you're experiencing, and fear and anxiety are ways in which your body is trying to cope with that dissonance. But for us, I wonder if that fear that we feel may move us more towards the reality of "but Jesus Christ has risen from the dead." And if that is true, all shall be well, all manner of things shall be well.

If circumstances cause us to sacrifice our faithfulness to the way of Jesus, as one author said, "It's likely because we feared not getting something from politics that we believe we need more than what God will provide if we are faithful." It's a way of supplanting or placing our hope in other places, and often that swells up within us as fear. As John would say, "Perfect love casts out fear," and God is love. Church, we do not need to be fearful. This isn't to dismiss the fears and anxieties you may experience, but I want to remind you that we are living in God's good world, and God cast out fear.

We are Able to Critique Our Own Party's Blind Spots and Failures

If we are to be faithful to the way of Jesus, we are able to critique our party's blind spots and failures. When we're caught up in political idolatry, our blinders come up, and we no longer see ourselves and others clearly. But to confess Jesus is Lord is to confess also that I am not Lord, which means I am flawed in how I view the world and how I understand the circumstances around me. So, to confess that Jesus is Lord means that I am not Lord and, therefore, will make mistakes. That means my vision of what's right and wrong is inevitably flawed.

This should foster a lot of humility in us. If you are unable to look at your preferred candidate or party and offer a critique as other sinful beings trying to sort their way through life and recognize they, too, may miss the mark, then we're swimming in idolatrous waters. Over time,

this devolves into the way we view others. We become so entrenched in our own particular party's viewpoint that the opponent is no longer just seen as possibly mistaken, but now we cast character judgments on them.

Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, would say, "Don't let your anger call someone *raka*," which is a word of contempt. It means fool. The best equivalent in our world would be idiot. If we begin to call others who are different than us, think differently than us, and view the world differently than us, if we begin to allow contempt in our hearts to call them idiots, Jesus has harsh words against us.

We need to recognize that there is no perfect solution and that every candidate and party is flawed. They will make mistakes. And if we are not able to faithfully, humbly offer a vote to our preferred candidate, then to not also turn around and critique them when they drift from the way of Jesus or the way we wish things would be, I would caution us.

At the same time that we offer our critique to our preferred party, we shouldn't see it when others do it as a personal affront. But what often happens when someone disagrees with us and speaks ill of the person who we are supporting, we begin to take that as a personal attack. I offer in humility that maybe we're putting too much weight on our party and candidates. There are no perfect solutions. There are no perfect candidates. There are no perfect agendas. And so let us be the first to humbly offer a vote, but then also quickly critique them when they need that and champion them when we can.

We Don't Assume That Our Preferred Political Party is God's Political Party

If we are to be faithful to the way of Jesus, we don't assume that our preferred political party is God's political party. I get worried when I hear language about us talking about God as the one who's raised up this particular person or this particular party because what happens when that person may or may not succeed? I recognize that the most mature among us can sometimes slip into assuming we know the very heart and mind of God. But remember, it was the disciples who left. They thought they knew Jesus. And yet they had missed it.

One of the problems with this is we're woefully inconsistent as to who we think God is raising up. Oftentimes, it seems to me, that when we claim that God raised up a particular individual, it tends to align with where we are politically. I can't help but think it's a little ironic. To claim that God is this or that party or this or that candidate is to take a position of arrogance that assumes the heart of God. I would suggest that in my life, I have been wrong about that a lot. It is only in Christ that we look to for the words of eternal life. It is the kingdom of God that transcends any political party. Therefore, we must be very cautious when we get into this place.

We are More Discipled by Jesus Than by Cable News/Prevailing Cultural Voices

If we are to be faithful to the way of Jesus, we are more discipled by Jesus than by cable news/prevailing cultural voices. I first came across the phrase "cable news discipleship" from a pastor in New York named

Rich Vallodas. I've come to both love and loathe this term because of its validity. It seems simple enough. And when I say cable news, I mean all news outlets much broader than those that come to mind. But the reality I fear is that in my own heart, I can become so consumed with politics that I can be more versed in discussing the ins and outs of a preferred candidate's agenda than I can the very teachings of Jesus.

If we are able to more articulate our candidate's position than Jesus' words in the Sermon on the Mount, I fear we've gotten off the rails. The incessant flow of media into our minds through our phones, TV, news outlets, blogs, or other sources is beyond what any of us were meant to consume. We cannot allow these voices to be more consistent and formative than the teachings of Jesus Christ. What we consume has a deeply formative impact on our souls.

I'm reminded of Jesus' teaching when he says, "I am the good shepherd, and the sheep of my flock recognize my voice." Do you recognize the voice of Jesus above beyond other voices? These are the things we need to resist in a world of political idolatry. If we're going to get to the place where we can humbly confess, like Peter said, "To whom shall we go?" That won't happen by accident.

There are two things that we can do to resist that. The first is quite simple. The daily reading of scripture. This is already part of our community's rule of life. And I would guess a lot of you already have this habit. But if we are to hear the voice of Jesus more than any other prevailing voice, if we are able to go to him and say, "You alone hold the words of eternal life," we must allow our minds to be saturated into the teachings and voice of Jesus.

To offer a practical way to do this, we've created a reading plan for you on how to do this for the next 80 days, which gets us right around the election. It's on the CPC app, and it's a way in which you can read through the Sermon on the Mount twice, so once in 40 days. And there are short reflection questions. This will not take you very much time at all, but if Jesus is our Good Shepherd, and we are to name him as our shepherd, we must grow in familiarity to his voice. So I would invite you to commit in the next 80 days to the daily reading of scripture as a counter voice. There's something unique to the Sermon on the Mount.

The second thing we can do is create self-imposed limits on screen time, social media, and news media consumption. I want to invite you to do that because those forces are quite formative in our world, and we are surrounded and hounded by them. Being informed is not a problem. I know many of you will say, "But I need to make an informed decision." I would suggest we're two months from the election, and I would guess your mind is already made up. I don't think there's anything that will take place between now and November 5 that will change your mind, and that's okay.

What if it was a little better for our souls to tune that out if our decisions are made up? For me, this past week, I deleted all social media from my phone because I recognized how it was distorting my own vision, heart, and soul. I've committed to that through the election for sure. But I, too, am recognizing the trappings of something like that.

I don't know what that looks like for you. That's why I wrote that broadly self-imposed limits may be better for your soul if you disconnect a little bit. Here's the deal. We all worship something or someone. Fundamentally faith is about trying to get somewhere where we haven't been, and to do that, we need the voices of someone who has been there. As followers of Jesus, we look to Jesus as that voice.

All of us make sense of reality through the mental maps and visions of the world. What is shaping those in your life to be human is driven by the question for eternal life. The temptation before all of us is to seek hope in other things. The offer to all of us from Jesus is, "Come follow me." Ignatius of Loyola offered this definition of sin.

Sin is an unwillingness to trust that what God wants is your deepest happiness. Until I am absolutely convinced of this, I will do everything I can to keep my hands on the control of my life, because I know better than God what I need for fulfillment. Ignatius

Do you trust God? What does the next step of trust look like for you? I wonder if Jesus is posing the same questions to you and me this morning. "Do you want to leave too?" May we honestly confess like Peter, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life."

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

© 2024 Central Peninsula Church, Foster City, CA
Catalog No. 1486 FC