

February 17, 2019 Sermon “Teddy Roosevelt”  
Rev. Mark Moline

In this morning’s first reading, we find the prophet Jeremiah speaking on behalf of God as he proclaims: “Thus says the Lord: Cursed are those who trust in mere mortals and make mere flesh their strength, whose hearts turn from the Lord.”

You may disagree, but my take on that brief prophecy is: “It’s OK to trust in other mortals, in so far as that trust, that allegiance, that loyalty does not turn our hearts from the love and teachings of Christ.” That trust in others can’t be allowed to take precedence over our faith in God.

In this nation of freedom, with government of the people and by the people, we want and we need human leadership we can trust. However, on this President’s Day weekend, we know better than to expect too much from mere mortals – even from those few elected to the highest office in the land.

I think President Theodore Roosevelt nailed this concept with his words (quote)



It is absolutely necessary that there should be full liberty to tell the truth about the President’s acts, and this means that it is as exactly necessary to blame him when he does wrong as to praise him when he does right. Any other attitude in an American citizen is base. To announce that there must be no criticism of the president, or that we are to stand by the president right or wrong, is not only unpatriotic and base, but is morally treasonable to the American public. Nothing but the truth should be spoken about him or anyone else. (end of quote)

-Theodore Roosevelt

Nothing but the truth should be spoken about him or her or anyone. “Thou shall not bear false witness against thy neighbor.” Then too, it was Jesus who said to those who believed in him, “If you continue in my word, you are my disciples, then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free.” We as believers in Christ dare not let our hearts be turned from the Lord, --- that is turned from the truth. I think politics, if allowed, can do just that.

Now, this is not a political sermon. I desperately want it to be perceived as a sermon of truth. I know better than to drag personal political opinions into God’s house. I honestly don’t believe either side, embroiled in our nation’s current very divisive political controversies, can claim the exclusive truth.

It has now become so very difficult to find the truth. I sometimes think this truth shortage is all, more about what we choose to believe as the truth, than it is about what we know to be the truth. There are folks on both sides who are all too ready to conjure up their own truth from mere inuendo.

That which we choose to believe - was once relegated to the high spiritual realm of divine faith. To be a Christian required a leap of faith, or as Kierkegaard put it: “A leap to faith,” while everyday human politics simply prioritized that which was known fact. The ontological vs. the deontological.

Possibly, modern politics, or our trust in mere mortals, has somehow been elevated to a battle of faith. I think such would tend to turn our hearts from God and God's truth. Maybe, just maybe that is what Jeremiah is trying to warn us about in today's reading. "Cursed are those who make mere flesh their strength, those whose hearts turn away from the Lord," and turn to mere mortals. Again, there is nothing wrong with politics. It's our system and I believe it is a good system. I personally like it kept out of church and appreciate your efforts to do just that.

However, I think we are now famished for the truth, and that famine erodes the distinction between mere politics and spiritual faith. The lack of truth in politics is compelling us to misappropriate the truth that is in Christ for political gain. Again, I am not referencing here any particular political issue, candidate or party.

Then, to seemingly make matters worse, in the midst of our current widespread and divisive political controversies, we encounter "revisionist history" riding high on the crest of popular public opinion. Historians are rewriting history to enhance their own political agendas. Making it is every bit as difficult to find the truth of John Tyler or Millard Fillmore as it is to find the truth of our current President or any current candidate for the presidency.

We urgently need the truth. We need the righteous truth of Christ and the practical truth of mortal politics. While vastly different one from the other, we need them both.

We need truth from our politicians.  
We need truth from our historians.  
We need truth from our news media.  
We need truth from our judges.  
We need truth from our investigators.  
We need truth from science.  
We need truth from our churches.  
For we still find truth Christ.

"In the beauty of the lilies, Christ was born across the sea, with a glory in his bosom that transfigures you and me: as he died to make men Holy – let us die to make men free.... His truth is marching on." This weekend we celebrate all the President, so we pause briefly to reflect in the words of the Nicene Creed that - indeed, God's truth is still marching on.