

Series: Sermons from the Gallery
Sermon: Would God be a Democrat?

Matthew 25:31-46

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. 32 All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. 33 He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

34 "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. 35 For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, 36 I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'

37 "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? 38 When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? 39 When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?'

40 "The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'

41 "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. 42 For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, 43 I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.'

44 "They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?'

45 "He will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.'

46 "Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."

Last week, I opened up a can of worms. The sermon answered the question, Why God would be a Republican. Within their motto and policies we noticed that they had three pillars of belief that could be considered Godly. The first was individualism, the belief that every individual has sacred worth. The second was freedom, that each individual could be free to pursue their own interests, and third, we have an obligation to liberate others who are not free themselves. Every Republican president in the last 100 years had been involved overseas somewhere spreading democracy and freedom. Those were the reasons we gave to promote the idea that God was a Republican. Today, we are going to shift to the other side of the aisle and spectrum and highlight the alternative view, "Why would God be a Democrat." The party platforms and agenda's of each of these parties, I believe, both have sacred merit. The goal of this sermon series is for us to understand that, in theory, both political parties promote Godly wisdom, heavenly ideals, and a faithful witness. It seems to me that now is the day and age where we are fairly split in the political life and neither side is willing to entertain the idea that maybe, just maybe, there might be virtues in their opposition party. Apparently, now is not the time for moderates. In their home state, moderates are getting blasted for not being hard-nosed Republicans or hard-nosed Democrats. It is my hope that we can see that each political party holds true to a faithful expression of a Godly life. Reminds me of a story. There once was a father and a son who were walking along the road one

day with their donkey. Soon they met a man who told them how foolish they were to walk when they had a donkey that could be ridden. So the father and son hopped on. They hadn't gone far when another man criticized them for both riding the donkey. They were too heavy for it, he contended, and were being inhumane. So the boy got off. It wasn't long before a third traveler accused the father of being inconsiderate because he made his son walk while he rode. So the two switched places. Soon they met another person who charged that the son was not being thoughtful of his father, who was so much older than he. When last seen, the two were trudging down the road carrying the donkey. I know that I cannot please everybody with this series. I'm afraid that the democrats with think that I favored the republicans and that the republicans think that I favored the democrats. In the end, it is my hope that none of you can determine what party, if any, that I am affiliated with. With that, lets take a look at the beginnings of the Democratic Party.

It was 1792, and the new experiment of Democracy was taking shape. We had just won the Revolutionary War against Britain - we had gotten rid of the king. When Washington took office, there were no political parties, just men. But within the founding fathers, there was an ideological split between what this country was going to be. Some looked to having a country similar to those in Europe. One of the big debates for Washington was his title. Should he be "His Excellency?" "His Majesty?" or "His Highness". In the end, he went with "Mr. President," dispelling all of the formal aristocracy of their former protocols. Wrapped up in this fight of aristocracy versus the common man was the fight for the Bill of Rights. The Federalists did not want the Bill of Rights in the land, they rather liked the idea where Government could intervene at any given time without due process - it was for the protection of the nation. Leaders of this group included John Adams, Alexander Hamilton among others. The anti-federalists insisted on the Bill of Rights for the protection of the common man. The leader of this new anti-federalist political party was Thomas Jefferson. It's a good thing we don't have issues anymore about Federal Government overreach and local control. In 1798, this party of the "Common Man" morphed into the Democratic Republican Party. In 1800, Jefferson was elected President over the Federalist Adams. It was the very first peaceful transfer of national power in the history of the world. The common man had won. Because of this, it is within our national persona that Every Man is considered equal and everyone has a shot of the American dream. It was a democrat who wrote most of the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. It was the democrat Madison who led us through the War of 1812. The war hero Jackson soon became the people's president as well. It was Jackson who started the party convention and the current political process of open nominations and people participation in the decision of who will get a party's nomination. They simplified their name from the Jeffersonian Democratic-Republicans to just the Democratic Party. It is currently the longest running political party anywhere that is still in existence. It was the Democrats who embraced the immigrants as they came to our shores 100 years ago. It was the Democrats, who led a movement of agrarian reformers and supported the right of women's suffrage, the progressive income tax and the direct election of Senators. Before that, our senators were not elected by the people, but by the House of Representatives. It was a Democrat who led us through World War One, through the Depression, and through World War Two. They established the Federal Reserve Board to control fiscal policy and they passed the first labor and child welfare laws. They brought water to California's Central Valley, electrified Appalachia and saved farms across the Midwest. They also began the Civilian Conservation Corps, the WPA and Social Security. Throughout it's history, the Democrats have been seen as the party of the common man.

So what do democrats believe in? What are the things that would make it, dare I say it, "Godly?" The first thing that I see in the Democratic Party is their appreciation for and their emphasis on the working class population. I think they are still the common man and woman party. It is by the sweat on their brow and wisdom in their brains that they get along in life. And we have a unique love affair in this country with the working class, blue collar or white collar. We embrace the notion of rolling up our sleeves to get things done. We look at work as a virtue. This is in direct opposition to the other nations a century ago, where the aristocracy made the laws of the land and the wealthy lounged around. The problem with aristocracy isn't the money or the wealth or even the power. That's what the working class is working for! The problem lies with the belief that aristocracy is a God-given right and that God favors them. It's the pride that is the issue. Throughout the Bible, you find reference

after reference of how God favors the little man. King David came from the smallest and most insignificant tribe, the most insignificant family and he was the runt of the litter in that family. And yet he became one of God's chosen one. A man after God's own heart, the Bible says. Most of the important people in the Bible came from working class families. Who did God choose to repopulate the planet after the flood? Noah, a wine-maker. Not a king or royal family. Not a religious man or educated teacher. Jesus himself, I'm sure, had calluses and bruises from his labor as a young man. He was a carpenter himself, not a ritzy high power profession. By our very nature as Christians, we are to favor the little guy. Democrats aren't against money or wealth or power. Just look at the current candidates. Economically, I think they're going to be just fine. The overall, the party is against selfishness. Their first Godly trait. Like I said, these are broad strokes of political ideologies. Sometimes we live up to our beliefs and sometimes we don't.

Their second Godly trait, closely tied to the first, is that they believe in the equal opportunity for all. Everyone should have the same chance as everybody else. The same rules should apply to everyone, regardless of station in life or power available to them. In the Old Testament, God held the same law to everybody, from the lowly peasant to the king. I mentioned King David before. The Lord came to David after David had committed adultery, committed murder, committed lying, and said, "David, you are not exempt from the Ten Commandments." As punishment, the Bible says that the Lord gave David the knowledge and the warning that his kingdom was doomed from the start. He and his son Solomon shall rule, but after that, all bets were off. And more than that, it would falter. According to the Old Testament, the rules and the laws were available to everybody. That has a flip-side of course to the New Testament. The Old Testament is a Testament of laws. The New Testament, through Jesus, is a Testament of Love. And you can equally find it's equivalency. All persons are welcomed to God's family. Not just the Jews anymore. But to the Gentiles, to the outcast, to the lame, to the blind, to the sinner. God does not exempt anyone. All are equal in God's sight. And we are to treat others as equals as well. Their Godly trait is equality.

And their third Godly trait is their concern for Justice. We believe that God is a just and fair God. The plight of our fellow person is not to be overlooked, but we are charged with a sacred task of providing hospitality to others, to love and to show compassion. To see to it that justice is available to all and not just to those who can afford it. To follow the commandments of God, wrapped up in a simple saying "Love the Lord your God with all of your heart, your mind, your soul and strength and Love your neighbor as yourself". That is our responsibility as Christians. By justice, I don't mean punishment for wrongdoing, although that is involved. Justice is, at the theoretical level, the way we give out rewards and punishments in society. It is the allocation of benefits and corrections. Just some examples. In Portland, how come some streets have a generous portion of pavement while some of the poorer areas have thin little streets? Who pays for the pavement? If it's property taxes, then you can see the fairness and justice. If it's sales taxes, then shouldn't everyone get the same amount of street? It's a justice issue. In crime and punishment, if someone uses a gun to rob \$100 dollars from a Plaid Pantry, they get 10 years easy. If someone steals a million dollars through embezzlement, they get 2-5 years? It's a justice issue. Ever notice all of your credit card offers come from Wilmington, Delaware? Because of something in their state constitution, they are exempt from the Usury laws that everyone else has. They are the loan shark of the nation. If you miss a bill from anywhere, not just the credit card, they can raise your interest rate. You miss a phone bill, and your credit card interest goes up to 29%. It's a justice issue. The democrats have always been concerned about justice.

Last week, when we discussed Republicans, I was able to have an interview with the Republican Governor of a Red State. For this week, I thought about who I could interview from the Democrats. Our own Governor is slightly busy dealing with Federalist issues out west. In the end, I was able to interview a Senator who is the president of the State's Democratic Party. Again, like last week, no names. I asked the Senator what Democrats stand for, and he responded that Democrats nationwide stand for the collective good, by upholding the rights and looking out for the well being of not only the people in power but also the under privileged. They have an obligation to lend a helping hand to neighbors. They fight for equity, whether it is in healthcare, aid to seniors,

good schools, or a just well-run economic system. He is proud to be a democrat for several reasons. First, he was born and raised that way. His family always fought for the underdog and the outsider. He was raised on an Indian reservation in a tiny town. He doesn't agree with everything about his party, it would actually be scary if someone did agree with everything that their party does promote, but he thinks that the Democrats are closer to the ideal of serving the best interests of all people, public interest over self-interest. I also asked him the horrible question, like I asked the Governor, "If someone had the audacity to say that God was a Democrat, what proof could they offer," He responded, "Of course God is a Democrat! I do not know why anyone would say anything different." He then continued, "Of course, God is also a Green Party member, a non-partisan and a Republican. God is [in] all of us...The only way I truly see God is in the spirit and actions of my fellow men and women, whether they are conservative, moderate, or liberal." He then said, "With that in mind, Godly Democratic traits are many. Care for the poor and underprivileged. God's call to care for the poor is manifested in American Politics by the Democratic Party. Searching for the truth, Education and taking care of the young. Care for our elderly is a successful hallmark of the Party. Medicare and Social Security are our government's greatest accomplishments and were driven by Democratic ideals."

I finished our conversation with the same question I asked the Governor. "What are the pressing issues in our state that a church like ours can help to address?" He responded, "Care for the underserved is always our call. Newcomers to our state stand out as one of the most visible and pressing issues all across Nebraska. Integrating our latest wave of immigrants will not only help them but it will help make our communities stronger. Churches that serve as a clearinghouse for people in need of any kind of assistance including healthcare, childcare and short-term financial assistance can make an enormous difference to those who need it. Advocating for justice in our court system, educational equity and economic fairness are all examples of what is needed from people of faith. There is a great cost for a small church to do this work, but the efforts are worth it." I appreciate the time that Senator spent in answering these questions.

Like I said before, I think that both political parties are trying to be faithful to God while highlighting different aspects of party platforms - each with sacred merit. Is God Democrat? No. But the Democrats do promote Godly ideologies, from being the common man party to their striving for equality to their concern for justice. And like I said last week, wherever you stand in the political spectrum, I think all of us could agree: no matter who's in power, may God bless America.