

The Reverend Jon Hauerwas - March 8, 2020
Anticipating What Is to Come
Psalm 121 and John 3:1-17

I have long been fascinated with politics. When I was child, I read books about the American Presidents. In middle school, I began collecting the campaign buttons and posters that now occupy one corner of my church office. My collection spans ideologies. And each piece in it symbolizes the human desires to frame problems and to seek solutions in the context of that particular moment.

In college, as I have mentioned here before, I originally expected to pursue a career in law or law enforcement. I studied history and criminal justice. But I also registered for a course in comparative world religions. I was curious to learn more about the belief systems of others, and I wanted to discern if the Christianity of my youth still made sense for my life.

I now recognize that it's unlikely for any of us to keep a truly open mind. But I was blessed in my seeking, emerging with both a deeper understanding and appreciation for others. Finally, though, I found God not in a textbook but in relationship. On campus, we formed a community together founded on trust and

mutual support. Remarkably, in the years that followed, five of us from that small group received ordination as Presbyterian ministers.

It's hard for me to believe that those memories are now twenty years behind me. Yet despite the time and the many miles between us, we've kept the connections. We remain a community. Just yesterday, one of my college friends, herself a Presbyterian minister, went shopping for her wedding dress. My friend is in her early forties and is making preparations for her first marriage. What a blessing it is to celebrate these moments together.

Some say that when you find the right person, you just know. I imagine that the same might be said of community, as well. We just know when it feels right. We just know in our hearts when we are valued. We just know when we have come home. Yet, for me, even the idea of home has gradually been transformed. In my mind, home is no longer merely a place or a memory. It is wherever the Spirit moves – wherever God emerges.

In our second lesson this morning, John writes, “The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.” The message for us

is this: no matter how inspired our motivations, how good our intentions, or how rational our solutions, we do not control time and we will not dictate the future.

Stated differently, time itself is not a tool to be seized but a gift to be received. In our journey of faith, we remember that Jesus entered time – our time – in order that he might disrupt it and show us a more excellent way. Therefore, while I remain fascinated with politics, I confess that politics cannot save me, nor will it finally bring me home. For just as all human knowledge is limited, all human solutions are incomplete.

By this, I'm not suggesting that we ought to stop hoping, or trusting, or believing. Clearly, history offers countless examples of political movements that have served as forces for good in this world. Instead, I'm cautioning us to be mindful of the temptation to get caught up in the moment and to replace God with political ideologies of our own making. Daily, we are called to make room for the Spirit.

Back in our second lesson, a Pharisee named Nicodemus came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God." Jesus' responded by telling him that he needed to be born from above, and by saying

that “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.”

Marcellus “Bear Heart” Williams is a traditionally trained shaman of the Muskogee Nation-Creek tribe. He is also an ordained American Baptist minister. Williams writes, “Someone once said to me, ‘I wish I had the same amount of spirit that you have.’ I turned to him and said, ‘We were all given the same amount of spirit. None more, none less. The difference between individuals is allowing the Spirit to have more of you.’ So that’s where the difference is, yielding to that spirit more.”¹

Friends, in faithful community gathered at this table of abundance, may we learn to yield more to that Spirit, receive the gift of this day, and know that we have finally come home. All thanks be to God. Amen.

¹ Mikeal C. Parsons, *Connections: A Lectionary Commentary for Preaching and Worship, Year A, Volume 2, Lent through Pentecost*, ed. Joel B. Green (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2019), 55.