



**December 9, 2018 - Sticking by the Message**  
**Given by Rev. Mattei**

[Luke 3:1-6](#)

The Christian life is a call we get by being exposed to the Word of God. the “call” is about being in the sphere of influence of God, to participate in the divine project, and to play by God’s Rule. The “call” is not to resort place where we relax, get served and put on a few pounds. The “call” is to live a certain way, with a specific vision, trusting the visionary.

The gospel lesson today begins with a roll call of important figures: Roman rulers and Jewish leader. If anything of importance happened in Judea, it happened through these men. During the time of these rulers “the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness.” Check out the red carpet line up: Tiberius, Pontius Pilate, Herod, Philip, Lysanias, Annas, and Caiaphas are not recipients of God’s word. Why are they by-passed and not elected as depository of the gospel message? Are they resistant to the Word, not deemed receptive enough? John, an unknown prophet/messenger in the wilderness is on fire with the Word of God. Are these important men fire resistant? Are they self-extinguishing and immune to being impacted by divine fire? Has some existential reality inoculated them from flammability? These men have one thing in common: power, both political and ecclesiastical. Luke seems to suggest that God’s word is suspicious of power and Christians should be skeptical of those who seek it. I can’t help but wonder at John’s reaction when he was tapped by the Spirit of God to preach a message of repentance: “Who me? Are you sure? There are more affluent, powerful and convincing people than I!”? Or maybe: “I’m glad you asked! It was about time someone noticed how talented and good looking I am!” Did he try to avoid the call and live an undisturbed, quiet and protected life? Or was he actually waiting for the spot light to finally shine on him? Yet, I trust none of the above were his first reaction. He was more likely in touch with the Spirit within and responded as the simple and humble servant of God he was.

God is up to something of great importance through unknown and simple people and not through the rulers who are attached to the power of their thrones. In fact, the powerful will be overturned and the lowly will be lifted up as the outcome of God’s

redemptive work. This work gives priority to the dispossessed and poor (see Mary's Magnificat, [Luke 1:46-55](#)) and will enable all flesh to see the salvation of God (3:6). To bring down the powerful from their thrones ([Luke 1:52](#)) is obviously and primarily a political act, just as it is an act of political defiance to prepare the way of the true Lord and Savior ([Luke 3:4](#)) as in opposition to the demands of the occupiers who expected that special treatment upon entering conquered territory. God is ushering in a value system that will impact how people will conduct their day-to-day lives. Luke is not shy about the political ramifications of living according to God's Rule. Conversion to God translates into a new way of life, and the worship of God is not limited to a well-defined holy space such as the sanctuary or to a narrow understanding of holy day as limited to Sunday. Once under God's Rule, all is holy. All places and all times belong to God. All that we do is consequential and therefore political, and all things political become a way to worship the true God (power from within oneself, empowered by Spirit within, and with others, sharing in the God-with-us, Emmanuel) or give in and worship the gods of fame (pride), affluence (control) and dominion (power over). The Roman Emperor wanted to be worshiped as Lord and Savior. John the Baptist was announcing otherwise.

I bet the Romans warned Luke in many ways to stay out of politics and limit his application of the gospel to the spiritual realm. But he couldn't help it. And he wasn't concerned; why would he be? He was well aware that it is God's character to save and "that we, being rescued from the hands of our enemies, might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all our days." (Luke 1:74-75) Luke is aware of the psalmist who denounces the wicked who have "closed their hearts to pity" and care only about accumulating wealth for this life and with their mouth speak in arrogance ([Psalm 17](#)). Jesus encourages us not to worry about the despot of the moment but to commit our loyalty to the One who has supreme authority and holds our life in His hands ([Matthew 10:28](#)).

Abraham Joshua Heschel once said that "Man is a messenger who forgot the message." That is very possible when we let the cares of the world distract us ([Matthew 13:20-23](#)). We can experience amnesia and disconnection from the saving power of the gospel truth even when we seek people's acclamation and favor: in such cases, our most immediate concern is to feel comfortable and avoid conflict and alienation without realizing that those are short-term fixes ([Luke 9:24](#)). But the apostle Paul is confident that "the one who began a good work among [us] will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ." (Philippians 1:3) So we don't want to put off searching for and speaking the truth. The gospel spoken and witnessed in our lives means salvation for ourselves and for those around us. ([Romans 10:14](#))

At a time when white supremacy arrogance and violence is on the rise and party ideology has the upper hand over civil political discourse it is more than imperative that Christians do not insulate themselves from the current social climate but engage with constructive common-good suggestions. As we speak to one another, we want our speech to be consistent with our Christian values: enough with disparaging language attacking race, gender, sexual orientation...The use of the “N” word, sexually charged comments or misogynists jokes have no place in a civilized society and should not exist in a Christian culture. Demeaning and offensive language is contrary to Christian values, and we should make it clear that we do not share certain world-views, attitudes and behaviors.

We also want to do what is necessary to protect and support life from start to end in our Country and around the world. There is increasing knowledge of crimes afflicting our brothers and sisters in neighboring Haiti. The FB Synod plan to send members to learn from our companion Church has been scrapped. We have been informed of news that even the Department of State has publicly decried: the Haitian society is engulfed in continuing and increasing crisis. Protests, tire burning, and road blockages are frequent and unpredictable. Violent crime, such as armed robbery, is common. Local police may lack the resources to respond effectively to serious criminal incidents, and emergency response, including ambulance service, is limited or non-existent. Travelers are sometimes targeted, followed, and violently attacked and robbed shortly after leaving the Port-au-Prince international airport.

On top of this, our Government is considering sending home people on Temporary Workers Program, Haitians included.<sup>1</sup> I am concerned and fearful for people’s lives, for their safety and well-being. It’s like sending them into the lion’s mouth. Maybe it’s time for me to write to our elected officials and express my consternation and dismay.

May the Lord touch us with Jesus’ Spirit of compassion and courage to live out our faith. May the kingdom of God come in our hearts and our world. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.businessinsider.com/trump-signs-order-targeting-h-1b-visa-program>