Since I was a child I have heard the saying that at social events, including meals, one should not discuss religion or politics. I want to talk about both. Throughout history there has always been a relationship between political realities and religious realities. Thinking about Holy Week and Easter, the tribulations of our Lord, his imprisonment, his abandonment by his disciples, his unjust trial, and his crucifixion, we see that each of these events have political implications. He was betrayed by the most efficient government of his day. The Romans who occupied our Lord’s country sold out their leadership to a puppet ruler, Herod, and a weak leader, Pilot.

The religious leaders of the day appeared to be threatened by and jealous of our Lord’s popularity, power and growing movement. He was a threat to their structure and through political means and by exercising political influence they manipulated the political structures of the day for the cause of injustice. They wanted to protect their own position, standing and perceived authority.

Of course God triumphed over this evil. Though the government’s incompetence and the religion’s selfishness were both operative, it was God who triumphed. First, through making our Lord’s suffering and death an offering that would show the depth of God’s commitment to humanity by embracing and forgiving all of our sin, incompetence, manipulation, and then by offering an opportunity to transform our thinking and our behavior. The cross became a symbol of life and forgiveness. And even more astounding, God overcame all that sin, incompetence, manipulative behavior, fear and death by raising Jesus from the dead. God is stronger than any obstacle. God conquered death and showed humanity God’s own power in the resurrection of his son Jesus Christ.

So how might this speak to the reality of our own American politics here in 2016? These are troubling times, in my opinion. The disease within our American political system is generating further polarization among our citizenry. I am coming to believe that we, as Episcopalians, are being called upon to speak with a voice of reason and a voice of faith.

One of the stories that I’ve always enjoyed in Scripture is the calming of the storm. Jesus was traveling with his disciples across the Sea of Galilee and he fell asleep within the boat. His disciples wrestled with the storm until finally they became afraid they would sink as they were being swamped by the waves. They woke Jesus, who then questioned their faith before he calmed the storm. I wonder if we, the Episcopal Church, can be awake to our Lord’s ministry of calming the storm. It seems to me there is a storm brewing within our country that could lead to serious consequences, not only for our nation, but also for the world. I believe we are called to speak out with a voice that calms the bombastic rhetoric. Jesus was about forgiveness, reconciliation, showing God’s deep and abiding love for humanity, the value of sacrifice, and the willingness to assist others.

Donald Trump is not the answer. Hillary Clinton is not the answer. Bernie Sanders or Marco Rubio or Ted Cruz or John Kasich or any other politician is not the answer to our problems; Jesus Christ is the answer yesterday, today and tomorrow. Jesus is the one who reconciles the world to his Father in Heaven and we are invited to join in his ministry of reconciliation. Let’s regain our focus. I’ve been feeling the storms of the current political climate and I’m asking our Lord to calm the storm within me so that I might be an effective voice for him and I invite you to join me in this. Let’s make a difference. The power of the gospel is greater than the power of politics. I believe our country is experiencing a time of blindness, deafness, lameness, and I pray we can act before we experience death. Let’s embrace the power given to us by our Lord Jesus Christ so we may be a people who join in Jesus’ ministry of calming the storm, healing the sick, giving sight to the blind, giving hearing to the deaf, helping the lame to walk and raising the dead. Our politics need religion!

Yours in Christ,

The Rt. Rev. John S. Smylie