

Amos 5:18-24

Alas for you who desire the day of the Lord! Why do you want the day of the Lord? It is darkness, not light; as if someone fled from a lion, and was met by a bear; or went into the house and rested a hand against the wall, and was bitten by a snake. Is not the day of the Lord darkness, not light, and gloom with no brightness in it? I hate, I despise your festivals, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; and the offerings of well-being of your fatted animals I will not look upon. Take away from me the noise of your songs; I will not listen to the melody of your harps. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

Matthew 25:1-13

'Then the kingdom of heaven will be like this. Ten bridesmaids took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. When the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them; but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. As the bridegroom was delayed, all of them became drowsy and slept. But at midnight there was a shout, "Look! Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him." Then all those bridesmaids got up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish said to the wise, "Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out." But the wise replied, "No! there will not be enough for you and for us; you had better go to the dealers and buy some for yourselves." And while they went to buy it, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went with him into the wedding banquet; and the door was shut. Later the other bridesmaids came also, saying, "Lord, lord, open to us." But he replied, "Truly I tell you, I do not know you." Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

Sermon: What's Wrong With Being Wright?

One figure that emerged, rather badly bruised in my opinion, from the recent Presidential campaign was the Revered Jeremiah Wright, Jr. He saw his career as a pastor reduced to about thirty seconds of sound bites and his life as an American tarnished with accusations of being a traitor.

Here is a man who was born in 1941 in Philadelphia where his father was pastor of a Baptist Church and his mother the first black person to teach an academic subject at the local Junior High. She went on to be the first black person to teach at the High School and became the school's first black vice principal.

After two years of college Wright joined the United States Marine Corps. Then after two years of service, he joined the United States Navy and trained as a cardiopulmonary technician at the National Naval Medical Center in Bethesda, Maryland where he was part of the medical team that cared for President Lyndon B. Johnson.

After the service he went back to college and then to seminary and became pastor of the Trinity United Church of Christ, Chicago in 1972; at the time it had a Sunday worship attendance of about 90. By 2008 Trinity United Church of Christ had become the largest church in the United Church of Christ.

Then came the campaign and the sound bytes - remarks which I would not be willing to defend, but which I doubt deserved the weight they were given in the course of campaign.

It might interest you to know that at one time this church had a minister who was also veteran and whose political views came to be considered not only disloyal and radical but even as so heretical that he was expelled from the association of ministers here in Litchfield County and left the state under a cloud of accusation, although with the unwavering support of this congregation.

As elections go, one of the most bitterly fought was one of the earliest, the election of 1800 when Thomas Jefferson ran against incumbent John Adams and Revolutionary War veteran Stanley Griswold was pastor of this church.

Thomas Jefferson called his election "the Revolution of 1800" because it marked the first time that power in America passed from one party to another. This was in spite of the fact that many people felt having a two-party system in America was dangerous - a society should be governed by the consensus of the leading citizens, clergy, and civil authorities.

But, during the presidency of John Adams, political factions began warring openly. Adams and his party, the Federalists, had led the nation into an undeclared naval war with France and passed the Alien and Sedition Acts, aimed at stopping radical French influence in the United States and limiting the influence of foreign-born people who were critical of Adams' policies. The acts gave the president the right to expel or imprison any alien who was "dangerous" or "suspect" of treason and authorized fines and prison terms for anyone who wrote or distributed "any false, scandalous, and malicious writings" against the government with the goal of defaming U.S. officials or bringing them "into contempt or disrepute." Jefferson opposed all this.

Jefferson, in turn, was bitterly opposed by the Establishment in Connecticut. They felt his time as ambassador to France made him suspect as a terrorist and an enemy of the church - he was accused of being an atheist and plotting to burn down churches and outlaw the Bible. Stanley Griswold, combat veteran of the Revolution, pastor of the First Congregational Church in New Milford, openly supported Jefferson, and after his victory preached a sermon to a gathering of supposedly forty thousand people in Wallingford. He entitled it "Overcoming Evil With Good."

Maybe he was right about his political views, and certainly as a veteran he had a right to whatever views he held, but being right is not always the only consideration to keep in mind.