

May 29, 2022

Sermon Manuscript

Acts 16:16-36 (NIV)

¹⁶ Once when we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a female slave who had a spirit by which she predicted the future. She earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune-telling. ¹⁷ She followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved." ¹⁸ She kept this up for many days. Finally Paul became so annoyed that he turned around and said to the spirit, "In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!" At that moment the spirit left her.

¹⁹ When her owners realized that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to face the authorities. ²⁰ They brought them before the magistrates and said, "These men are Jews, and are throwing our city into an uproar ²¹ by advocating customs unlawful for us Romans to accept or practice."

²² The crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas, and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten with rods. ²³ After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. ²⁴ When he received these orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.

²⁵ About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. ²⁶ Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everyone's chains came loose. ²⁷ The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. ²⁸ But Paul shouted, "Don't harm yourself! We are all here!"

²⁹ The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. ³⁰ He then brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

³¹ They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household." ³² Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. ³³ At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his household were baptized. ³⁴ The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God—he and his whole household.

³⁵ When it was daylight, the magistrates sent their officers to the jailer with the order: "Release those men." ³⁶ The jailer told Paul, "The magistrates have ordered that you and Silas be released. Now you can leave. Go in peace."

Philippians 1:1,12-14,20-22a, 2:3-7b, 3:17-21, 4:4-7 (NIV)

^{1:1} Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus,

To all God's holy people in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons...

¹² Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel. ¹³ As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. ¹⁴ And because of my chains, most of the brothers and sisters have become confident in the Lord and dare all the more to proclaim the gospel without fear...

²⁰ I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. ²¹ For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. ²² If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me...

²³ Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, ⁴ not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

⁵ In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

⁶ Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;

⁷ rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness...

^{3:17} Join together in following my example, brothers and sisters, and just as you have us as a model, keep your eyes on those who live as we do. ¹⁸ For, as I have often told you before and now tell you again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. ¹⁹ Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things. ²⁰ But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body...

^{4:4} Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! ⁵ Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. ⁶ Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Political Theology from the Kingdom of God

So this past Thursday was Ascension Day - and we've already been singing about that reality, which means that Jesus is reigning even now - over all of creation - at the right hand of the Father. And the good news of Jesus' ascension is that it makes **living in and for God's kingdom a live option for**

us, which is always a better choice than living according to the ways of the kingdoms of this world.

The Shortcomings of Worldly Kingdoms

Now, living in the United States of America, we live in possibly the greatest empire - the greatest worldly kingdom - there's ever been. And I know that this weekend is Memorial Day weekend, when many of the sacrifices are remembered that contributed to America's continued reign. And it should be said that there is a whole lot of good that the United States does and has done in this world. Not all worldly kingdoms are created equal - and on the balance the United States has more virtuous than many other kingdoms both past and present. But no matter how much good a worldly kingdom can do, how much better it may be than some of its peers, the goodness of worldly kingdoms can never compare to the kingdom of God. *All* of the kingdoms of this world - despite their shine - have a ceiling to how good they can be because ultimately they can only offer their citizens *illusions* of hope and peace¹ - and so pale in comparison to the kingdom of God - because all worldly kingdoms are founded upon and maintained through violence and death, and even in the best case scenarios will be characterized by rampant inequality, injustice, and exploitation - some more than others - but even the best worldly kingdoms are powerless to bring true peace and hope for what life in this world will throw at their citizens, to make no mention of the death that awaits us all. As we will see, the kingdoms of this world fall drastically short of the kingdom of God that Jesus came to save us into. But the good news of Jesus' ascension is that it makes **living in and for God's kingdom a live option for us, which far exceeds the potential goodness of worldly kingdoms.**

The Shortcomings of Worldly Kingdoms

This morning our passage from Acts 16 exposes the shortcomings characteristic of all worldly kingdoms in comparison with the Kingdom of God. *In Acts 16*, the missionary journeys of Luke, Timothy, Paul, & Silas have brought them to Phillipi - a city deep in the heart of the Roman empire - arguably the greatest worldly kingdom the world had seen to that point.

And our passage opens by introducing this slave girl who was possessed by an evil spirit, which gave her the ability to predict the future, but also discern spiritual realities. So when she encounters the four apostles, who were on their way to the synagogue, she begins shouting, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved." Now I know we've all heard that all publicity is good publicity, but when you're missionaries you never want a demon doing your PR.² So Paul, annoyed, casts the spirit out of her by the power of Christ.

But when her owners discover this, they are enraged. Why? Because they had been profiting off of the psychic ability this demon had given her, and now her usefulness to them was gone. And so, they seize Paul & Silas and haul them before the magistrates. So in this relationship between the slave girl and her owners we see one limitation of worldly kingdoms - their economic systems value people based upon their usefulness for profit and encourage people to exploit each other for selfish gains. This demon may have enabled this girl to work as a psychic, but we know the other side effects of being demon possessed would've been far outweighed this benefit. But when Paul frees her from this spiritual oppression, her owners are livid, because they benefitted financial from her oppression. And do we think these owners would provide for this girl now that her abilities were gone? Of course not. But this is the economic reality of worldly kingdoms - even ours today. Sure, capitalism may be better than

¹ For more on the four horsemen of the apocalypse from Revelation 6 see the sermon from 11/7/21, manuscript now available at the bottom of <https://www.saintmatthiasoakdale.com/revelation>

² What she says is true - they were ministers of the most high Gog - but in that cultural context it isn't the whole truth: in the polytheistic culture of first century Rome, the title "most High God" was used by some in reference to the Jewish God, but by others to refer to Zeus; and note that she makes no mention of Jesus.

communism, but that doesn't mean it doesn't encourage exploitation of people. Yes, it works for the top percents, but it actually doesn't work all that well for most. The very engine of capitalism is greed, it wouldn't work without it.³

But the bend toward economic exploitation is not the only deficiency of worldly kingdoms, as we said, the illusion of 'peace' - or more accurately the relative peace they offer to some - is ironically both established and maintained by violence against others. When the girl's owners take Paul & Silas before the magistrates in verse 20, their argument is that Paul & Silas are disturbing the peace.⁴ Well, "keeping the peace" was the magistrates' primary job and these owners have more standing with them than Paul & Silas. So they have Paul & Silas stripped, beaten with rods, and thrown into prison, where they are put into stocks. So they use violence on those with little standing to keep the "peace" and maintain the power for those with greater standing. This is how worldly kingdoms work. They have to be established by violence - through war - they have to be maintained through violence or the threat of violence, and by definition worldly kingdoms make in-groups who benefit at the expense of out-groups. You see this at our crisis at the southern border - there are people coming in with great needs, but the arguments are logically made: "We can't take care of the whole world; the line has to be drawn somewhere." Even if some politicians want there to never be a line, they're hitting up against the limitations of worldly kingdoms, which at the end of the day are *limited* in the number of humans they can be a blessing for.

So the **peace** that is offered by worldly kingdoms is an illusion, because it is founded on violence, they survive on violence, they're incapable of respecting the dignity of all people, and their economies can't mitigate exploitation and usually encourage it. And yet the **hope** they hold out even to their most privileged citizens is an illusion as well. Verse 26 tells us that during the night, Paul & Silas were sitting their in the prison stock singing hymns when there is an earthquake, so fierce that it shakes open the prison doors and prisoners' chains. Well, when the jailer woke up, it would've been extremely dark inside the cells, so when the jailer sees the prison doors open, he just assumes the prisoners escape, and he knew he would be held responsible - fair or not. *And his immediate impulse was to kill himself.*⁵ Now, think about it: this jailer probably had a pretty good life going; he had a good paying job with responsibility, we'll later learn his has a family - in a lot of ways he was living the American dream, I mean, the Roman dream - but the whole time *he knew* that his value as a person and his security - all of his hope in life - was derived from his usefulness to the empire. And all it took was a natural disaster - an earthquake - for that to crumble down.

We can celebrate the relative goods that even the empire we live in brings, but as Christians we cannot ignore the limitations that all worldly kingdoms have for addressing our human predicaments. But **the good news of Jesus' ascension is that it makes living in and for God's kingdom a live option for all of us**, which offers true peace and true hope, and not to one group or another, but to anyone who comes. As Jesus says, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink!" (Jn 7:37)

The Values of the Kingdom of God

Even though we live in an age where worldly kingdoms seem to rule the day and be the only option - every human being is resident in some worldly kingdom - Jesus invites us to live as citizens of an invisible Kingdom - the Kingdom of God. And in our Acts passage, we see Paul & Silas modeling what it

³ For more on capitalism's limitations and living generously in a capitalist society, see the sermon from 1/30/22 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p2OxCknyUfc>

⁴ On the non-Roman customs these slave owners accused Paul & Silas of in verses 20-21, Tim Keller recently wrote on social media:

Roman Empire: "You Christians are too exclusive. You threaten the social order because you won't honor all deities."

Modern West: "You Christians are too exclusive. You threaten the social order because you won't honor all identities."

BTW-Not thinking mainly of sexual or racial identities. Christians question the very way modernity demands people form identities. Now Identity determines moral norms rather than the other way around. Identities become deities.

⁵ Jailer was confronted with execution here (although not responsible for earthquake, he could be held responsible for not adequately securing prisoners); romans considered suicide nobler than execution

looks like to do this - to be residents in the Roman empire, but to live as citizens of the kingdom of God, to - like Jesus - live in the world, but not of the world (Jn17:16). But before we look at that, in a letter Paul would later write to the church in the town they're in - the Church in Philippi - we can see Paul outlines many of the values that Jesus invites us to live by as citizens of his heavenly kingdom, which I've also summarized on a flyer in your bulletin.

In the excerpts from the letter to the Philippians I provided for our second lesson, I will first draw your attention to the red section where I underlined in Philippians 3:20, just before that in 3:18, Paul wrote that "many live as enemies of the cross of Christ" and in 3:19 that "Their mind is set on earthly things" - so they live according to the ways of worldly kingdoms - but then in verse 20, Paul writes, "But our citizenship is in heaven." But the rest of the excerpts I've included really unpack what these values are.

1. Backing up to the blue section in chapter 1, we're reminded that Paul wrote this letter from another time he was in prison. But he doesn't seem to care, because he can see how his being in chains is benefitting the spread of the gospel among the prisoners, it's all worth it to him. So when we are living as citizens of the Kingdom of God, our life goals are twofold: to keep Jesus' Two Great Commandments - Love God and love your neighbor - and fulfill the Great Commission - "go and make disciples of all nations..."
2. And being faithful to those goals (of the 2GC and TGC) will supersede even our own survival. In 1:20, in orange, Paul doesn't know whether he will live or die, but cares only that he has sufficient courage so that Christ will be exalted in his body.
3. Third, if you look at the green section from chapter 2, because living in the Kingdom of God allows us to trust the Lord to provide what we need, this frees us up to look not to our own interests but to the interests of others, even to the extent of laying down our rights.
4. Fourth, in verses 5-7 in brown, Paul says, "In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who (did not use his status for his own advantage)... but rather... made himself nothing... taking the nature of a servant." Jesus was not only willing to sacrifice his benefits as the Son of God for our sakes, but he did so in a non-coercive manner. Jesus lovingly serves us, but he leaves it up to us whether to receive it or not.
5. And finally, only in the Kingdom of God - not from the kingdoms of this world - can we find true peace and hope to endure the troubles we'll face in life. This is reflected in the final paragraph from chapter 4 (in purple), where Paul from this place of eternal confidence, writes,

⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! ⁵ Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. ⁶ Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

The good news of Jesus' ascension is that it makes living in and for God's kingdom a live option for all of us. And for Paul his citizenship in heaven is not just something theoretical that he sung about in worship, rather it informed how he went through every situation of life.

Paul & Silas as Icons of God's Kingdom

And this is what we see returning to our Acts passage, where **Paul & Silas model prioritizing their heavenly citizenship** (in the Kingdom of God) **and its responsibilities over their earthly citizenship** (as Roman citizens) **and its privileges**.

- A. Notice, first of all, that when Paul & Silas are dragged before the magistrates they *do not mention* that they are actually Roman citizens.⁶ This is significant because Roman law prohibited its citizens from being beaten with rods *or* put in the stocks. So why don't they reveal their status here?⁷ Well, scholar David Peterson observes that Paul had an attitude of detachment to his Roman citizenship, (believing) he should take advantage of it only insofar as it furthered the cause of Christ."⁸ And perhaps they discerned in prayer that God had a greater purposes, as this torture would allow them to begin a more intimate connection with the jailer, who would put them in the stocks (v24). So here Paul & Silas show a willingness to forego rights & privileges, and even endure punishment and shame (not unlike their Lord), for the sake of the Gospel.⁹
- B. Second, notice the peace & contentment they enjoy *despite* being wrongly imprisoned: as they are singing hymns and praying at midnight, where the other prisoners could hear. What a witness to those prisoners, and what a contrast to the hopelessness of the jailer when he quickly becomes suicidal following the earthquake.
- C. But finally, once the earthquake has happened and they see the jailer is about to kill himself - remember their eyes would've been more adjusted to the darkness than his - do you see their love for him, their enemy? The way they value his life by not escaping and by Paul quickly shouting, "Don't harm yourself! We are all here!" and mollifying the man's despair. They sacrifice of themselves to offer this man hope.

It is the witness of Paul & Silas living in a worldly kingdom, but living according to the priorities of their heavenly citizenship in the kingdom of God, **that is the difference** that causes this jailer to bring them out in verse 30 and not just to say, "thanks for not escaping", but ask them, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" "How can I get the hope that you have? Cuz this earthquake just exposed the hope & peace of the empire I've been trusting in my whole life for the lies that they are!"

The good news of Jesus' ascension is that it makes living in and for God's kingdom a live option for all of us, and only as we begin to live in and for the kingdom ourselves will we have anything to offer a world stuck in darkness.

Doing Political Theology from the Kingdom of God

So, having established the values of the Kingdom of God, in the few minutes I have remaining I want to consider two hot-button issues that are in the news and on people's minds so much right now: and that is abortion and guns. [I'm gonna go long today, I'm sorry.]

With the leaked Supreme Court ruling on Roe v Wade a few weeks ago and this week's massacre of 19 children and two teachers in Uvalde, Texas, every single one of us is being inundated with opinion and perspectives.¹⁰ But what concerns me is that Christians seem to be allowing the options presented by worldly kingdoms to eclipse their vision for thinking about these issues from a kingdom of God perspective. Many of the supposed Christian positions on these issues are really just christianized based on worldly kingdom principles - where there's winners and losers, where some lives are valued more than

⁶ We know Paul does assert his Roman citizenship later in Acts 22-23

⁷ Later in this passage, after they are let go, Paul does assert their Roman citizenship. Scholar Craig Keener suggests Paul likely does this then to recoup honor. Having been publicly stripped & beaten in that honor/shame culture, the shame would have followed the church if they did not receive public vindication as they do in v37-38 after mentioning their roman citizenship in v39

⁸ Peterson, David G. 2009. *The Acts of the Apostles*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans. ... quoted in *Acts: A New Covenant Commentary - Part II: Chapters 13-28M* by Youngmoo Cho & Hyung Dae Park, Eugene, OR: Cascade, p. 532.

⁹ Notably, the jailer after his conversion also behaves sacrificially by bringing Paul & Silas into his home, which risks punishment for negligence if they escaped, and eating with them, which eating with prisoners was punishable possibly by death (Craig Keener).

¹⁰ A priest colleague of mine observed that the conservative American position position on abortion is we should change the law to stop the killing, but on guns is that changing the law won't help - we need to address the root cause. Then the liberal American position is flipped: that with guns we should change the law to stop the killing, but with abortion changing the law won't help, we've got to address the root cause.

others, where some are loved more than others. But what I've been wanting you to see this morning is that as citizens of the kingdom of God we are to be living by an entirely different paradigm of principles and values. One of the greatest harms to the Church's witness over the last 50 years is we have farmed out our political theology out to the world's categories of liberal or conservative, but that's letting the world dictate our vision for what is possible.

So before I close today. I want to model how these two issues might be considered from a kingdom of God perspective, by explaining briefly how I've been sorting through them. But the point of me sharing is not to get all of you to necessarily agree with where I land on these issues; we are not fundamentalists - we don't have to all land in the same place. My goal, instead, is to encourage us all to think and pray about these issues according to Kingdom of God principles, instead of the limited categories of the worldly kingdom.

So we've said that the kingdom of God operates according to these values (on your insert). First, with the goals of fulfilling Jesus' Two Great Commandments of love and His Great Commission. Now, importantly, I should stop there and note that it is *not* a kingdom value to construct or maintain a Christian nation. I

don't care whether this Founding Father went to church or that one believed in God, the concept of a Christian empire is completely incompatible with scripture.¹¹ Empires don't get saved, people do. So our marching orders from Jesus are to care about people. But the other values of the kingdom of God are prioritizing faithfulness over our own survival, living for the sake of others, willingness to sacrifice our rights, the kingdom is non-coercive, and the kingdom extend hope & peace to endure life's troubles. And I hope you will notice that these values all characterize the life of Jesus.

So how do I apply these principles in regard to the issue of abortion in America, where over 4,000 babies are aborted every day? Well, in regard to how Christians should use any influence we do have with the state, on this issue, many Christians have brought the full weight of their influence on this one issue; I think we can stipulate that if it weren't for efforts by Christians, Roe v Wade wouldn't be getting overturned. But my concern about Christians leading this effort to reduce the number of abortions in this coercive manner toward pregnant mothers through law, is that it devalues the potentially negative impact on the mothers' physical or spiritual well-being. It's great for the unborn baby, at least til it's born. But it completely ignores our priorities of love and salvation for the mother.

Physically, the outlawing of abortion will lead to a rise in mortality of pregnant women who resort to "unsafe" abortions. But these efforts also do spiritual harm to these women, as we Christians choose to position ourselves as their enemies, by seeking to coercively control what they do, which does spiritual harm to the witness of the gospel. My question is: what eternal good does it do for a nonbeliever if we restraining their immoral behavior, but the way we do it hardens them to the gospel because we've done it coercively rather than with love or empathy?

SERMON SUPPLEMENT

Values of the Kingdom of God from Philippians:

- "our citizenship is in heaven"
- Goals: Fulfilling Jesus' 2 Great Commandments & His Great Commission
- Faithfulness supersedes our own survival
- Live for the Sake of Others
- Willingness to sacrifice one's own benefits / Non-Coercive
- Peace & Hope to Endure Life's Troubles

¹¹ Some bad interpretations of the book of Revelation have led many to the false conclusion that America is a Christian nation, indeed, even a new Israel. As compelling or inspiring as many may find these ideas to be, they are based upon gross misreadings of Revelation that employ reckless hermeneutical methods. And this misunderstanding is certainly not helped when political leaders (from both sides of the aisle) have historically co-opted scripture about Israel as God's chosen people and applied it to the United States. Scripture is clear that the promise of God is on his Church, not on any worldly empire. For more on this, see the 3 part homily series on Revelation 12-13 (videos and manuscripts) found at <https://www.saintmatthiasoakdale.com/revelation>

Now some may say, “well, it saves the life of the baby”, but that’s worldly thinking. Because why do we have to choose between the well-being of the baby and the well-being of the mother? The answer is we don’t. For example, studies show that paid maternity leave would be *more effective* in reducing abortions because many women seem to choose to abort due to feelings of hopelessness about fiscal and relational strain that child would put on their lives or the kids they already have.¹² And so, a more kingdom of God approach to reducing abortions - that values the lives of both mother and child - is when Christians seek to use their influence or to sacrifice their own resources (or both) to give hope to pregnant mothers, not unlike the hope Paul gives to the jailer.

So the current dominant Christian approach on abortion sacrifices little, chooses coercion, and unnecessarily pits concern for the unborn child at odds with the well-being of the mom. But a more kingdom position would be to hold the love commandment and the great commission together (so our witness is not damaged) and sacrifice ourselves in some way for the well being of both lives - not just their biological survival, but their physical and spiritual well-being. The difference is that this Kingdom approach costs us a lot more than the culture war approach, which is why - in our sin - we opt for the culture war.

So then, there’s the guns. We live in a country where there have been 288 school shootings in 2022 alone, and the next highest number is Mexico with..... 8. We all know it’s a problem and incidents like Uvalde have left many of us wondering how much more can our hearts take; and yet, we aren’t even the ones who’ve had a child shot. Now, clearly there’s a profile, a type, of people who commit these atrocities: individual males who are isolated, who lack in-person community, and have often been radicalized into hateful or conspiratorial views by the internet. So if there is a way to befriend or minister to this population, the Church absolutely should. Give them hope, call them out of death culture. But practically speaking, this population is not easily identifiable in the same way that pregnant mothers are or accessible.

So this leaves Christians using their influence with the state to encourage the enhancement of legal restrictions. But the structure of this situation is actually very different from abortion. We’re not having to choose between two parties - like the child vs the mom. Here, legal restrictions making it harder for a troubled 18 year old to buy an AR-15 are in the best interest of both school kids and the would-be shooter. What is at risk are *our rights*. I know the concern is that even if the government just rules out AR-15s and requires universal background checks, that it’s a slippery slope toward now I can’t go hunting with my grandson or defend oneself from violent attack. So the risk is to us. But, as Christians, we are the one who are already assured of our eternal hope. Wouldn’t it be better for us to take the (astronomically small) risk of being shot & killed and going to be with Jesus, if it could reduce the risk of children and would-be shooters dying, many of them, apart from knowing Jesus??? And the witness, where the push to overturn Roe V Wade has harmed Christian witness, imagine the powerful witness to the world if we said, “We’re gonna put ourselves at more risk - even the way of harm - by being will laying down our arms - to give life to others, because that’s what Jesus did with his life for me.”

Closing

Now, again, my goal here is not for everyone here to agree with me in where you land on these issues. Even though I’ve put a lot of thought and prayer into them, I could be wrong. I’ve certainly thought differently about these issues in my past and my perspective is limited. And you may quibble at this point or that. That’s okay.

¹² <https://www.npr.org/news/opinion/end-abortion-dont-ban-it-support-families-instead>
<https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2022/05/27/1099739656/do-restrictive-abortion-laws-actually-reduce-abortion-a-global-map-offers-insigh>

In our gospel passage today,¹³ Jesus prays for his people to be one. But this doesn't actually mean we all have to *land* on the gun control or abortion issues in the same place. But the way we should be **united** is that **our positions on those issues and the many others are informed by kingdom of God** principles of faithfulness, hopefulness, peacefulness, love, and sacrifice for the sake of others.

The biggest difference impact most of us are gonna have on these two issues is not in literally preventing a mass shooting or abortion. It's in our witness to others who hear us talk about it. If we have given in to the categories of our worldly empire on this, they're just gonna categorize us as liberal or conservative. But if we talk about this from a kingdom perspective, and reveal those are the values that inform our position, that illuminates to others that Jesus opened a whole different way for us to live in this world.

A PRAYER COMMENDED BY BISHOP MENEES IN RESPONSE TO UVALDE SHOOTING

(but applies to both issues)

BCP 2019 pg. 659

Almighty God, you created us in your own image: Grant us grace to contend fearlessly against evil and to make no peace with oppression, and help us to use our freedom rightly in the establishment of justice in our communities and among the nations, to the glory of your holy Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

¹³ John 17:20-26