

“If I Were Donald Trump’s Minister (Or Clinton’s, or Cruz’s, or Sander’s)”

“Have compassion for everyone you meet even if they don’t want it.

What seems conceit, bad manners or cynicism is always a sign

Of things no ears have heard, no eyes have seen.

You do not know what wars are going on down

Where the spirit meets the bone.

Forget your perfect offering.

There is a crack in everything.

That is how the light gets in.”

Religion and spirituality and practiced preaching gets talked about on Sundays,

But actually practicing the preaching, religion and spirituality we talked about

On Sunday begins on Monday morning -

The light and shine of the sanctuary in the rear-view mirror,

The chalice flame hours ago extinguished,

Love is the Spirit replaced by the mantra For all that is holy Wake Up Now!

You’re gonna be late!

No we don’t have any good snacks for lunch!

Which is how I felt as I shut car door,

Stuffed the piles of recycle bags into one another

And threw them into the shopping cart, the handle still wet from the melting snow,

And pushed my way into the Ashland Market Basket,

Perhaps the only place in my life where I get exposed to any real racial and socio-economic diversity these days, which is telling and sad,

And at the same time still doesn't make me relish going there every two weeks...

Because I always seem to get the cart with the wheel that launches right

When I want to go left (and no that is not a political euphemism),

And there are always in an inordinate number of tantrum-ing children,

To whom I would love to sing something much more strongly worded

Than *Go Now in Peace*.

You get my drift?

Of course you do; which is why we come to church together,

Because we can all use the help to actually be the people we say want to be.

But this visit to the store brought me an extra challenge,

Because the people I was with on that particular morning

On the Market Basket Tour de Grind, each of us lapping

Each other through the freezer isle and the cereal isle and the

Giant displays of pop-tarts and valentine-themed chocolate

Have all made it a point to tell me – via hats and buttons and shirts –

Who they want to be our next president...

So that the white guy with the giant trucker hat that says *Trump will Make America*

Great Again! Is steering his cart around the suburban mom with

The *Hillary* button,

Who is reaching over the head woman with the crucifix around her neck,

Jesus there in the center of the 'C' of the *Ted Cruz* t-shirt she is wearing,

Who, in the previous isle, said 'excuse me' to the college kid wearing

A Northeastern sweatshirt,

Who I saw pull up in the parking lot in his Subaru with a "Feel the Bern!" bumper sticker –

All of them, all of us, there on a Monday morning in early 2016,
Bumping shoulders, buying the two-for-one Progresso soup and
2 for 3 boxes of spaghetti,
Looking for deals together on the shelves in this year that has seen negative
partisanship rise to the highest-ever levels, a phrase which means we would rather
root for our opponents to lose than root for our own side to win.

All of them, all of us, standing on one ground,
Beneath the same fluorescent lights, breathing the same air,
But in such different places, holding such different beliefs, so apparently
suspicious and dismissive and even angry at each other,
But still able to reach out and ask, as I see the Trump hat guy ask the woman
Who is probably Brazilian, and taller than him:
'Hi! Can you reach that box of Ritz crackers for me?

"What if I was this guy's minister?" I catch myself wondering,
Completely out of the blue and even though it's supposed to be my day off.
And because Sunday's worship was still thumping around in me, during which I'm
sure I challenged us to ask the tough questions, and afflict the comfortable,
I catch myself asking: *Never mind that. What if, what if I was Donald Trump's
minister?*

I chuckle at the thought.
I bet his pledge would be HUUUGE, I think, and laugh a little more.
Such is the quality of clergy humor.

But then, I swear, there in the soup aisle I wonder: *why stop there?*

What if I was Hillary's minister? Or what if Ted Cruz stopped attending his dad's church, and came here?

Or what if I was Bernie's Rabbi?

You're thinking: Nathan really needs help with his time off.

But I'm thinking: Ok, maybe. But really, What would I say? How big is our tent? How wide is our welcome?

What should a minister do when a member does things and says things

That may run counter to things our faith teaches?

How am I supposed to care for someone, even try to love them, if I don't like them very much?

How do I (and by extension, how do you, because ours is shared ministry)

Balance the feeling of being right in opposition to others...with the call to be loving in relation to others?

The Brazilian woman hands the Trump man his crackers, and smiles a welcome, Giving me this first insight:

If I was one of these candidate's minister I wouldn't get on the equivalent Of the store speaker and shout – clean-up in isle 7! A mess of mudslinging And stoking of fears in isle 7! Bring the mops!

Meaning, in contrast to these folks and their ads,

I wouldn't ever criticize in public.

Instead, I would call up – *Hillary, Ted, Donald, Bernie, can we meet in private?*

And they would say: *Sorry Rev. I'm in New Hampshire. No time.*

And I would say – *no problem, my job is to companion folks, not summon them to meetings. I'll come to you.*

(And taking a page from John Vest, from Christian Century Blog),

And all the pastoral care classes I ever took, the first question I would ask, If I was at my best, would be: *how are you, how is your spirit, in the midst of this campaign? When have been at your best? Your worst? Have you said things you regret? You're proud of?*

And then, if warranted, I would tell them that my role as their minister Of their church compels me to point out that some of the public statements and Actions do not jive with my understanding of the gospel they profess to follow:

Donald, when you said you would exclude all Muslims, and when you compared Your female opponents as dogs, slobs and disgusting animals, And you made fun of that reporter who had cerebral palsy - you, who say you are Christian, failed to live up to Jesus' commandment to love others as yourself. How come your religious beliefs didn't inform your actions/words?

Hillary, how does the notion that the humble shall inherit the earth, and first Shall be last, and the last shall be first, inform your decision to accept thousands Of dollars from big banks like Goldman-Sachs and Citigroup? Do those dollars prevent you from fulfilling your pledge to work for campaign finance reform? How do your religious beliefs inform your words and actions?

Ted, you claim that we are Christian nation and that you are the sole inheritor of the Christian vote.

Ted, are you saying you get to speak for Jesus?

Our founders would be dubious, Ted, because they sought not for religious sameness, or religious vote tests, but rather for religious liberty,

For the right to believe or not believe according to his or her individual conscience.

Do you want to be commander in chief or pastor in chief, Ted?

How do your religious beliefs inform your words and actions?

And Bernie,

Help me understand why you voted against the Brady Bill, a form of gun control legislation, five times?

How does the need to get reelected in a gun-heavy state like Vermont affect your votes?

Will a similar form of political reality inform your prophetic calls to limit the power of the 1%?

Bernie, what will it mean for you to be a prophet in your own neighborhood, remembering that Isaiah and Jeremiah, who you at times embody, never had to win elections, get voted in, or work for compromise.

Tough questions, right?

But if I'm at my best,

And if I let our beliefs inform our own words and actions,

Then being the minister of one of these folks means I can't be a negative Partisan.

It means I must act from the foundational belief

That Donald, Hillary, Ted, Bernie and all the rest have inherent worth

And dignity, that that in our Universalist language they are a beloved children Of God,

And that like us, they have faults and imperfections – they just happen

To get their faults and imperfections projected onto a global media stage.

Sure, you could say they asked for it.

Sure, you can even say they contribute to it.

But why do we seem to revel in it so much? is my point.

How much is our soul, our spirit, bruised, even concussed,

By all the hard hits and put downs and sarcasm in our politics...is my point.

How do our religious beliefs inform your words and actions?...is my point.

Now at the check-out, the signs proclaiming sales and deals and dollar signs,

And money is changing hands, a lot like our politics this year.

If I were Donald's minister, and if he heard what I asked him earlier,

I wonder if he would like me straight in the eye and say "*Rev. Nathan,*

You're fired!"

Good thing, then, that what makes a good business or a good businessperson –

The ability to keep the customer happy, and make a profit,

Isn't what makes a good minister, or for that matter, a good politician.

We have two teens now, so after I pay the ridiculously high bill for all this food,

I think what else I would tell them as their minister.

That unlike grocery stores and dry cleaners and Citibank and Goldman Sachs,

The goal of government is not to make money.

There are certain things money should not buy, such as (via Carolyn Hewitt):

1) Donald, Hillary, Ted, Bernie – Government should establish justice, even when a person does not have any money. We have seen this break down with privatization of prisons, prisons for profit, and making money off the incarcerated. Now we have the world's highest prison population. Are you kidding me?

2) Donald, Hillary, Ted, Bernie – Government should ensure domestic tranquility,
Free from money's coercion. But we have seen this fall apart as the Black Lives
Matter movement rips the blinders off of the larger society.

When money gets involved, one group is protected over another group,
And there, for example, is one place racism thrives.

3) Donald, Hillary, Ted, and Bernie – Ideally we believe that power should be free
Of money's influence. When money buys power and access, it is bribery
And establishes corruption.

I'm no politician, but I am a minister,
And even though I've read the church books, written by consultants
Who have never been parish ministers, that say that clergy
Should spend time with the biggest donors,
I agree with Carolyn Hewitt when she says uh-uh. No, no.
*"religion," she says, is in a different sphere. We don't pay more
For better religious services or favors or attention from our pastor.*

The same should be true for our president.
The church is not a business, and neither is our government.
In the church we had the Reformation when indulgences were being
Sold to folks looking for a bypass into heaven.
And in a democracy you could say this why we have elections,
But only if they're honest, and my voice matters as much as yours,
And your voice matters as much as those folks I shared isles
With in Market Basket.

Hillary, Donald, Bernie, Ted – you are each a child of God,

I might say as I push my cart out into the open sky, one sky,

One sun, one ground, -

But so is the banker, the Muslim, the atheist, the gun owner,

The immigrant, the soccer mom, the transgender teen, the gay couple

Living in a southern state, the angry middle-aged white guy wondering

Where his factory job went, the college kid with 100K in debt,

The Black Lives Matter protestor, the cop, the undocumented worker

Picking the grapes you ate this morning –

All of us, one country, facing the same stars,

All of us, one country, walking the same ground,

All of us, one country, breathing the same air.

What will do...what will we do...when we remember how we are in this together?