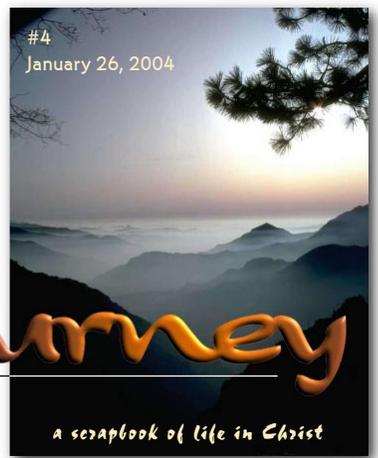


"Therefore everyone who confesses Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven."
(Matthew 10:32-33 nasbu)

the Journey



STAND & DECLARE

Blessed relief.

We here in the heartland can, at long last, breathe a sigh of relief. For a while.

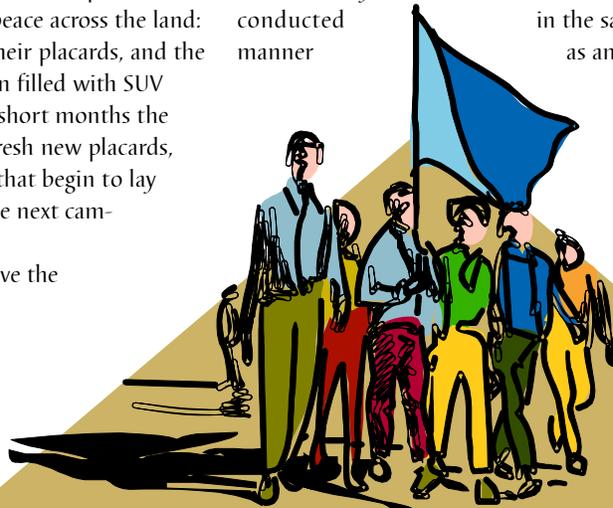
In some countries, political campaigns are mercifully brief, a flurry of intense activity just before the election. Here in the United States, however, political campaigns seem never to end. In the modern method by which we elect a president, for example, the period in which we are *not* in election mode is roughly equivalent to the period in which saner countries *are*. For a brief, shimmering moment after the president is inaugurated, there is peace across the land: campaigns put away their placards, and the airwaves are once again filled with SUV ads. But in only a few short months the activists are printing fresh new placards, and running new ads that begin to lay the groundwork for the next campaign.

Here in Iowa we have the dubious distinction of hosting the very first, substantial "vote" for the presidential race. As hard as it is to believe,

though the actual election will not be held until November, we in the heartland have been suffering the ill effects of campaign commercials for many months. Iowa is first in an interminable series of *primaries*—state-level votes intended to winnow the field of candidates vying for the office.

Iowa's part in this, however, actually is not a primary, but a *caucus*. A primary is, essentially, a mini-election, conducted in the same manner as any

other election: any time during the specified day voters troop to their local polling place to mark a ballot for the candidate of their choice. Their choice is secret, private, and anonymous. But a caucus is quite different from a primary. A caucus is more like a neighborhood meeting, a two-hour gathering of local folks who might very well know each other by name. They gather in schools, church basements, libraries and, in some cases, living rooms, to discuss the various candidates (even to persuade each other to switch allegiance from one candidate to another), discuss local issues, and to elect officers and delegates to the county party conventions. In a presidential election year, the local caucus also provides an opportunity for each attendee to "stand" for the candidate of his or her choice. On the Republican side, this last process is conducted by secret ballot (a slip of paper dropped into a



hat), but on the Democrat side it is conducted publicly; individuals declare a preference for one candidate or another, and “caucus” with like-minded individuals in a separate corner of the room. On the Democrat side, it is the size of each of these groups that determines the poll results of the caucus as a whole.



Primary

Most Christians, it would seem, choose to conduct their daily walk with Christ more like a primary than a caucus. They prefer the secret ballot over the public stand. Like anonymous voters trooping into a polling place, every Sunday they promenade into their local church building for the purpose of privately casting their vote for the Lord. Attired in their Sunday-go-to-meetin’ finery, they make themselves even more anonymous, casting off the trappings of their everyday life, homogenized into the whole. They sit in the pew and speak God-talk for a while, blending in with the aggregate, voicing and acting only within the accepted norm of the venue. They reveal only goodness and Godliness, their behavior artfully crafted by tradition and many years of “church”; their offering is sealed inside an envelope.

When they leave the church building most Christians blend just as artfully back into their daily world. Their Sunday ballot has been cast in secret; no one outside that privileged realm is the wiser. How they voted or why, or even that they voted at all—all is tucked neatly and anonymously into Sunday. Religion is a private matter, after all. Isn’t that what everyone says? It cannot be permitted to encroach on government, or school, or business, or



Saturday afternoons at the beach—which, in today’s society, places it in company with illicit sex, scandal, and family shame.

This low-impact kind of faith is convenient, and far less messy than any more public kind. It is acceptable: religion is permitted in polite society so long as it never becomes the topic of discussion. It is easy: one hour per week—two or three at the most. It is private: anonymity is not only permitted, it is encouraged; no one really wants to know about the relationship you have with God.

A perfectly civilized primary.

Caucus

Oddly enough, the God these anonymous church-goers claim to worship seems to prefer the less-anonymous *caucus* system.

Oh give thanks to the Lord, call upon His name;
Make known His deeds among the peoples.
Sing to Him, sing praises to Him;
Speak of all His wonders.
(1 Chronicles 16:8-9 nasbu)

It is a bit odd, isn’t it. We discover a new piece of software that meets our computerized needs and we can’t wait to tell everyone about it. We log into online newsgroups and “blogs” to sing its praise and convince others of its superior qualities. We find a good deal on an appliance and can’t wait to tell our neighbor about the money we saved, or we find a reliable and reasonably priced contractor for some home repairs and

enthusiastically recommend him to anyone who asks. And every so often, in election years, some of us sign onto the evangelistic zeal for a particular candidate and go around knocking on strangers’ doors, spending vast quantities of time and energy declaring his or her worth, and supremacy over all others.

But then the eternal and all-powerful God of the universe comes down to shed His own blood on our behalf, in the process granting us—for the best price of all: nothing—eternal bliss with Him, and we keep it a secret! The Lord and Creator of everything that exists graciously saves us from an eternity of damnation and hideous misery—and we treat it as if it is

a shameful family secret that must remain private, hidden from everyone else.

Odd indeed.

And then, as if His gracious condescension were not enough, when we exhibit this boorish ingratitude, what is God’s response?

For both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one Father; for which reason [Jesus] is not ashamed to call them brethren.
(Hebrews 2:11 nasbu)

If the journey of our sanctified and sanctifying life is the path that leads to Christ-likeness, then we could do no better than to learn from His unabashed joy in standing up for us who belong to Him. We have been given a most precious and extravagant gift—one which is to be neither hoarded or denied, but shared freely. And just as He is not ashamed of us—even in our sometimes abominable behavior—we are not to be ashamed of Him, but to step boldly into the nearest caucus and enthusiastically declare our allegiance to the Lord: Christ Jesus.

But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.

(1 Peter 3:15-16 niv)

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