

## **No Secrets Are Hid**

*February 6, 2008*

(Ash Wednesday - Year A)

Matthew 6: 1-6, 16-21

*St. Alban's Episcopal Church, Waco, Texas*

Maybe because yesterday was Super Tuesday in our country, but thinking about the primary elections for President of the United States got me thinking of my own memories of voting.

When I was a child, and even when I first became of voting age, we never voted using a touch pad electronic voting machine.

We did not vote by pushing a steel pin through holes in punch cards.

Instead, as a child, and as a voting young adult, I can remember stepping into an actual voting machine.

These huge steel contraptions were wheeled into school cafeterias several days before an election and they must have been over 6 feet tall.

Around the voting booth was a dark gray curtain.

And when you stepped into the voting booth, you pulled a lever, and then, magically, the curtain closed all around you, so that the only thing that other people could see was your feet.

In the voting booth, you were shrouded in complete secrecy.

As a young boy, when my parents went to go and vote at the local elementary school, they always took my brother and I with them.

My brother and I were then split up - each one of us got to go into the voting booth with one parent.

And I loved to go into the voting booth with my dad.

I can remember us walking into the booth -

Then Dad would lift me up high in the air, so that I could pull down the lever that would magically close the curtain around us.

Then, it was just me and my dad, and no one else in the whole world.

As my dad quietly made his choices, by pulling down little black levers that looked like check marks, my dad would insist that I must be

very, very quiet and not say a word about who he was voting for.  
It was understood that what happened in that voting booth was secret,  
not to be repeated to anyone, not even to my mom.  
What we were doing - doing our civic duty as good Americans - was  
private.

For the voting booth, the secret confessional booth of American civil  
religion, was a place where I was alone with my father, quietly  
making important choices.

In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus says:

“Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by  
them.

But, when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right  
hand is doing,

So that your alms may be done in secret;

And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

And whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray  
to your Father who is in secret;

And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.”

What we do in secret - is important.

What we do in the voting booth, what we do in the confessional booth -  
alone with our Father - is important.

What we do quietly with our money - is important.

What we do alone on our knees in prayer - is important.

I speak and preach to you all the time about the importance of living the  
Christian life within the context of community.

Yet, Lent is alone time.

Lent is a time when we step into the booth,

When we pull the lever and the gray curtain closes,

Where God alone sees all the levers that we pull down,

Where God alone sees all the choices that we make.

Most Sundays in our worship services, we begin our worship with a  
wonderful prayer called the Collect for Purity, written by Thomas

Cranmer.

The prayer begins:

“Almighty God, to you all hearts are open, all desires known, and from you no secrets are hid...”

During Lent, we realize, once again, that we cannot pull a fast one over on God.

God is alone with us, even when we try to close the curtain around us.

God knows each and every one of our inner thoughts,

Each and every one of our choices,

Each and every one of our secrets.

God knows when you tell everyone how accepting you are of other people, yet you laugh at jokes about blacks or Jews or Mexicans.

God knows when you tell everyone in town that you go to St. Alban's Church, yet you skip church quite regularly.

God knows when you tell me “great sermon” at the church door, yet you have no intention of doing any of the things I talked about in that sermon.

During Lent, we realize, once again, that we cannot pull a fast one over on God.

And the best way to make a new and right beginning, is to step firmly into Lent, to step into that booth and pull the lever, so that the curtain shrouds us in secrecy,

So that we will spend 40 days alone with our Father, who sees us in secret.

And I have some suggestions for what we can do with our Father in our alone time together:

You can pick up the Bible and read about the love and forgiveness of God that is splashed all over the pages of that book.

You can come to Morning Prayer at 7 o'clock in the morning, here in the Higgins Chapel.

You can set aside a short time each day for intentional prayer.

And while you're at it, maybe combine that prayer time with some physical exercise by walking at the mall or in Cameron Park.

You can make an unwavering commitment to come to church every single Sunday.

You can decide what habits and addictions are ruining your relationships with other people and work to overcome them.

You can put your faith into action by volunteering at Mission Waco or one of the many, many helping organizations in this city.

Lent is not a time to pull a fast one over on God.

Lent is a time to make honest choices.

Lent is a time to be alone with our God, from whom no secrets are hid.

So as you enter this Lent, go into your booth and shut the curtain

And spend time with your Father, who is in secret;

And your Father, who sees in secret - will reward you.

AMEN.

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