

Election embarrassment

By [Evan D. Garner](#)

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As a blogger, I mostly stay away from politics. That's because I usually think that discussing affairs of state takes away from the message of the gospel. It's hard for me to read a politically charged piece from another theological blogger and not lose myself in the politics of the post. Pretty soon, I'm mad at someone for something and have totally forgotten what the point is. Jesus was certainly a political figure, and I bet he would have a lot to say about local, regional, national, and international politics if he were around today. But, as bumper stickers will proclaim, Jesus wasn't a Republican or a Democrat, yet even suggesting that self-evident point is to invite criticism and a long rabbit chase.

But there's something on my mind that I need to say.

Today is election day. In Alabama, most of our statewide offices are elected during the national election cycle that is dubbed "midterm elections." Today we will go to the polls to elect a governor, lieutenant governor, secretary of state, state auditor, state treasurer, one of our two U.S. Senators, an equivocation of representatives (yes, that's one of the acceptable collective nouns for politicians—one of the nicer ones) at the state and national levels, a sentence of judges (yes, that's one of the acceptable collective nouns for judges), and one particular office that I can't seem to get away from: our state's attorney general.

I can't imagine that anyone within the borders of our state has missed this particular election. I am not a shrewd observer of campaign ads, but I can't help but notice that the only negative ads I have seen have been those of both the Republican and Democrat running for attorney general. (I'm sure there are others out there, but I haven't seen or heard any of them.) They are fierce. They are mean-spirited. And there is nothing at all charitable about the whole mess. Why does that matter? Because both men are faithful Episcopalians in our diocese, and I am totally and utterly baffled by the ugly campaigns that they are running.

I know both Luther Strange and Joe Hubbard. I don't know them well, and I'm not sure either would claim to know me (except if it got them my vote). But the Episcopal Church in Alabama is not a huge institution. It's hard to be an active Episcopalian in our diocese and not know either or both men. When Joe Hubbard announced that he was running against incumbent Luther Strange, I thought to myself, "Hmm, that's an interesting move—an Episcopalian running against an Episcopalian. I wonder how that will turn out."

I had no idea.

St. Paul wrote in his first letter to the Corinthians,

When one of you has a grievance against another, does he dare go to law before the unrighteous instead of the saints? Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you, are you incompetent to try trivial cases? Do you not know that we are to judge angels? How much more, then, matters pertaining to this life! So if you have such cases, why do you lay them before those who have no standing in the church? I say this to your shame. Can it be that there is no one among you wise enough to settle a dispute between the brothers, but brother goes to law against brother, and that before unbelievers? To have lawsuits at all with one another is already a defeat for you. Why not rather suffer wrong? Why not rather be defrauded? But you yourselves wrong and defraud—even your own brothers! (1 Cor. 6:1-8)

Paul was talking about lawsuits, but I think the text applies here—and not just because both candidates are members of the same denomination. As so many candidates in bitterly contested races are, they are both members of the body of Christ. Is this really what politics have come to?

I am embarrassed. I am embarrassed that the nastiest campaign in recent memory is being perpetrated by two men in our church. I am embarrassed to be a part of an electorate that is influenced by such campaigns. I am embarrassed that, at the end of the day, one of these two men will win. But will he really?

What will I do about it? Maybe nothing. I'm certainly not willing to run for office. And I don't have any intention of writing letters to every candidate urging decorum. Maybe this post counts for something. I really don't know. But I do know that as I

head to the polls I do so with a heavy heart because this did not have to end this way. These two men share enough background as Episcopalians in Alabama to work out their differences like Christians should. Yes, politics is adversarial, and, yes, it's all about money, and, yes, usually the system works. But the only team that will win in this race is the one that seeks to rip God's people asunder.

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