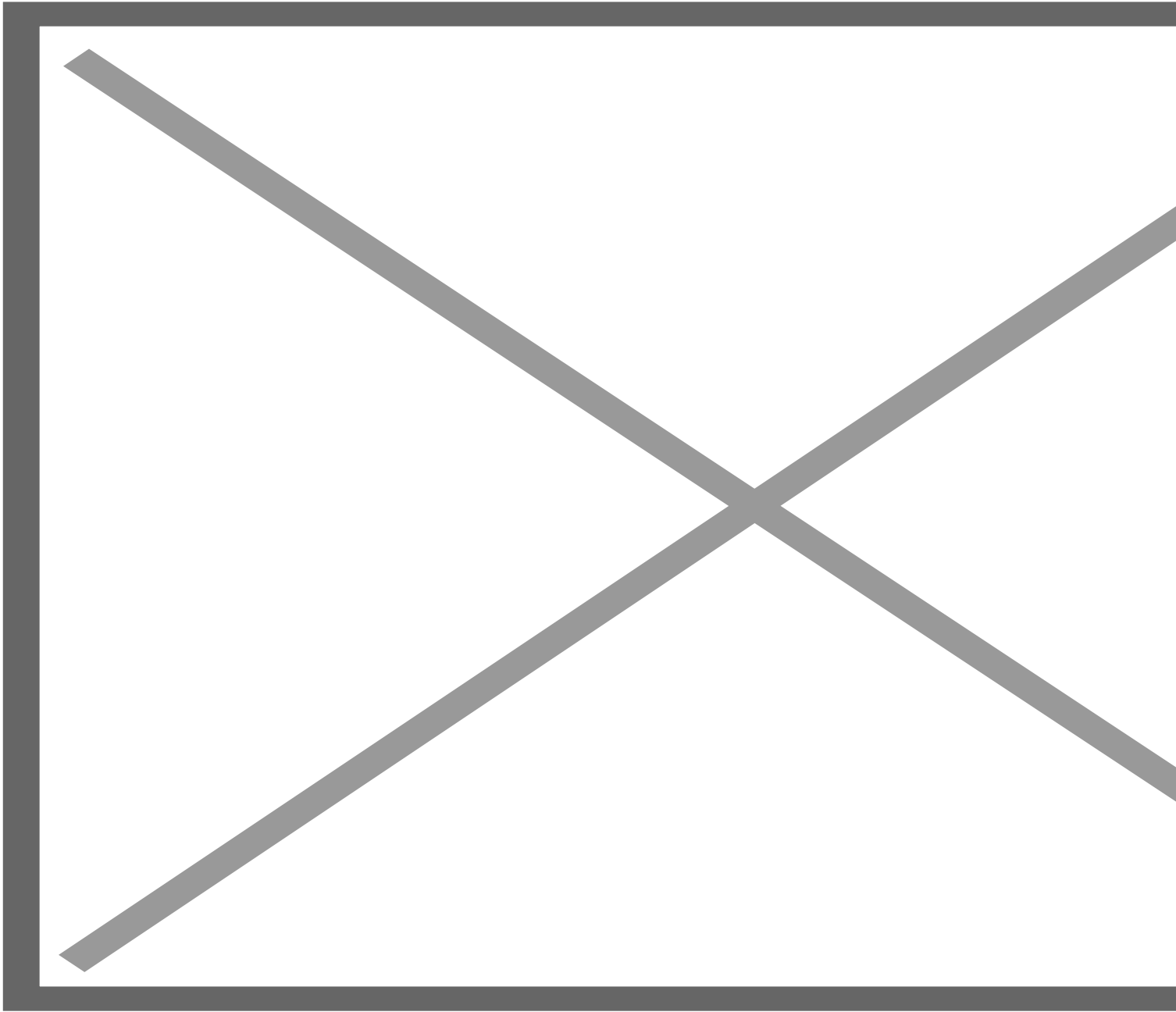


Eight guidelines for preaching in partisan times

Disengagement from politics is not an option. But I'm convinced that the problem for some hearers is more about method than content.

by [Peter W. Marty](#) in the [May 2026](#) issue
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There's one pair of words I see in more email subject lines than any others: *preaching* and *politics*. "I love our church," someone might write, "but I wish our pastor would stop bringing politics into the pulpit." Then there's the pastoral ache: "I preached on compassion and how easily we disregard the poor, and four people accused me of 'getting political.'"

There's no denying the challenge of preaching the gospel—in concrete ways that connect with everyday realities—to an America divided by party. Many people derive their moral meaning from politics, and it's no surprise that they can get offended when they are sitting in the pew absorbing a different moral order. People have come to see practically anything they disagree about through the lens of political ideology or party. And since scripture speaks to the moral dimension of so many political realities, almost anything uttered from the pulpit can be interpreted politically. Feeding hungry people has political implications; so does housing the unhoused. Complete disengagement from the world of politics is not an option for Christian living or faithful preaching.

As I've thought about all the well-intentioned sermons I've heard (or delivered) in the last decade, I'm convinced that the political rub for some hearers relates to the manner and method by which preachers craft their sermons. For preachers who are as convinced as I am that Jesus was adamant about care for vulnerable people, I have a few modest proposals to offer regarding preaching method.

First, preaching deserves to be richer and more expansive than mere commentary on current events.

Headlines beg for a response, but preaching reactively about breaking news doesn't compare with preaching about the significance of God, no matter what local or national crisis may be in play. Pastoral imagination asks for more insight than simply decrying the latest disturbing news.

Second, don't assume that every worshiper shares your feelings on a given topic, whether you're feeling outrage, exhilaration, despair, or something else. Regularly ask yourself whether those listening to your words are apt to hear a full-throated welcome and feel a sense of belonging, even if their politics do not align with your own.

Third, in the heat of a political moment, remember to say what you're for, not just what you're against.

The world needs morally articulate pastors who are purveyors of hope.

Fourth, humility is an asset when approaching complex social or political issues; over-confidence in your own reading of the times is not. When the gravity of a broad injustice demands strong, well-conceived words from the pulpit, by all means deliver them. Just don't defeat yourself by overestimating your prophetic gifts for laying out the truth.

Fifth, detailed information about current events rarely makes for great preaching—whether that information is in the form of statistics, policy analysis, or quotations from columnists we read. We preachers are there to help broker meaning, inspire lives, and help people meet God.

Sixth, it can be helpful to come at certain subjects sideways or slant. This is delicate work that demands nuance and artistry. Since people are increasingly accustomed to shaping their faith around their politics, they need biblical and theological help if they're going to learn how to integrate politics into the foundations of faith.

Seventh, do your people know the depth of your love for them as well as they know your politics? If they do, your preaching should reflect this. The deeper your bonds of trust, the greater the odds that you'll choose the wisest words available to you and that your people will receive them charitably.

Finally, recognize that there's a cost to speaking truth to power and love to people uninterested in love.

The most eloquent and stirring sermon can fail to persuade individuals who don't want their worldview upset. Keep the channels of communication open with them, however, and be prepared to try to learn from them when they express their displeasure.