



Auckland Unitarian Church

Love beyond belief

## Don't blame the politicians; blame the people who voted for them

David Hines © 23 August 2020

For my sermon I'd like to start off with Plato's comment that democracy is **NOT** a perfect system of government, because it encourages people who are selfish and irresponsible, and politicians who have to bribe them to stay in power.

### **My wishlist for our team of five million:**

- 1) Be well-informed; looking at all sides**
- 2) Lobby our leaders with empathy**
- 3) Show respect for politicians, including those you don't like**
- 4) Work for consensus**
- 5) If they go low, we go high**

### ***1. So the first goal on my wishlist is to be well informed.***

This has become a major part of our election, with the very complex issues of the Covid-19. Jacinda Ardern and Dr Ashleigh Bloomfield giving lectures that I would rate high among the lectures I heard in a BA degree.

- Did you know before this year that when you sneeze, fine droplets stay in the air for days, but larger droplets end up sticking on the walls of a bus or lift and could infect people hours later?
- I knew that gene testing could tell where your great great grandparents came from, but I didn't know it could also tell you where a virus came from
- And did you know before this how often should people be tested if they work in an airport, or a supermarket?

This is very technical stuff, and how can you know whether to vote National or Labour, if you can't weigh up differences like these.

And what about other major issues like climate change, which could do far greater damage than Covid-19?

Do we need Green members in parliament, to show the same team spirit?

**There is a battle for facts in all elections. But in this election there are some startling new facts.**

And this is not just a task for politicians but us. I suggest that part of the reason the US has the world's worst record over climate change, is that there are millions of voters who like freedom and don't like facts.

As Plato noted..... in a democracy even stupid people get one vote. Plato's answer was to get in a tyrant. Surely a better answer is to educate the public. And that's us.

My hero in this debate (besides Jacinda and Ashleigh) is the man in West Auckland, where there was an anti-covid conspiracy demonstration, saying Covid-19 was not real, and Bill Gates had secretly visited New Zealand to do something about it. He did his own rival demonstration with a placard saying these people are idiots.

There is a lot of fact denial in our community... And some religious groups are a prime example of it. That's why I include science among my sermons... we need to make science a larger part of our culture.

***2. The second goal on my wishlist is to Lobby our leaders, with empathy.***

That is the biggest lesson I have learned this year. It has been an eye-opener for me. I have done a bit of lobbying for eight years, in fighting for secular education, but this year I really caught the bug, and have had correspondence or meetings with a dozen politicians, and to my amazement I can identify with all of them.

It started for me when I was making a submission in parliament to the Education and Workplace committee, and part of my preparation was reading bios of all 11 members of the committee. And I found out things I could identify with in most of them, but not Nikki Kaye, the National party education spokesperson. I thought she was rather cold and right wing, but I was wrong. But I thought there must be something people like about her, and did a deeper Google search, and found:

- that she was very concerned about Chinese students who couldn't get to study in NZ because of Covid-19; and landlords were evicting them, for fear they could get infected.
- I also found several political writers who reckoned she should be National's next leader, because she is a very collaborative, centrist politician.

So I made a point of inviting her to speak about it here. She asked me to post her updates on secular education... And I was impressed what a good listener she was. If I

had been in Auckland central, I would have voted for her, though I would still have given Labour or Green my party vote.

I also contacted all the other party's education spokespeople, and there was not one of them that I did not like.

Golriz Ghahraman met me for a quarter of an hour in March, and then for half an hour in a second visit where I hoped she might make this an election issue for the greens. She didn't agree with me, but agreed to pass my requests on to the Greens policy committee.

Chris Hipkins would be my **favourite** politician of all parties, because of his courtesy, and taking my objections seriously, and even more because he then shone as the new minister of health as well. He is a star in my view.

Even David Seymour, who is so far right I could not vote for Act... but he also gave me 15 minutes of his time, and I agreed with two of his principles... freedom of speech, and the end of life bill. He is so approachable, he would be a good local MP... and if I had been in Eden, I could have voted for him personally, but not for his party.

So I get disgusted when I read the letters to the Herald and read only negative comments about our politicians. Nearly all of them have positive merits.

### ***3. The third wish on my wishlist is to Show respect for politicians you don't like.***

For all my previous remarks, Judith Collins is still a politician I don't like. And I did a groan when she became leader and Nikki Kaye pulled out of politics. But I had to admit that she was the most charismatic of the National party team, one of the most intelligent, one of the most articulate.

She has been maligned because of her involvement in the National Party's dirty politics campaign under John Key a few years back. But she came in for a lot of flak that she didn't deserve. A complaint was made about her connections with a Chinese businessman. It was investigated. She was suspended pending the investigation, and came out with a clean bill of health.

But she didn't get her former ranking back. There really was dirty politics then, as Nicky Hager pointed out... but she was on the receiving end more than the giving end. And she deserved to have a comeback.

But like her or not .... we should respect her. She is an articulate leader of the opposition, and unless we intend to deport all right-wing New Zealanders to America ... **she speaks for them; and we should respect them.** They are part of the team of 5 million.

Part of democracy is respecting people you don't like, and accepting that it would be bad for the country if we got all the things we believe in. **We have no right to demand that other people share our concerns.**

### ***4. The fourth wish on my wishlist is to work for consensus.***

One of my favourite political causes is consensus decision making, and this is the main virtue of our proportional representation elections. It is good that we have five parties in parliament.

One of the features of Maori society is that they traditionally use consensus decision making on the marae, and in several churches, the Anglicans and Methodists, and maybe others, the two groups need to agree for a decision to be made.

In politics we tend to focus on decisions made by a majority of 51 percent. It would be better if we aimed for 60 or 70 percent.

## ***5. The final goal on my wishlist is: when they go low, we should go high.***

That idea has gained popularity with Michelle Obama, and I believe it is a valuable tool in our politics, and we should be encouraging it in our own lives.

I think Jacinda is good at this, but even more so, I think is minister of education Chris Hipkins again. It was in the final debate over the Education and Training Bill. which got very little attention in the media. but I stayed up till the end, watching for the sections about religious instruction.

Chris Hipkins was in the chair, and he was superb at going high. Whenever there was a question, he would thank the questioner, and say how helpful it was. When he referred to the background of the debate he paid a very high tribute to Nikki Kaye, who had then announced her retirement, and said how good she was to work with, and how good she will be in her next position whatever that is.

Whenever he talked about the future of education. He kept wishing the best for New Zealand under the next government, whichever government it might be. And he capped it off by saying he expected the tone of goodwill to be out of fashion for a couple of months, he hoped we would go back to co-operation after it is over.

Now I accept that this standard is so high, it is almost impossible to achieve. There have been moments in this debate when both parties have been negative, and self-justifying, and when Jacinda and Judith have been trying to outdo each other in toughness... especially over sacking members of their own party who misbehave. At one stage I was wondering whether we would run out of politicians on both sides of the house.

I especially felt sorry for the National member who was having an affair with a member of his staff.... and I thought so what? But on the gentle side, I recall Dr Bloomfield refusing to get into a witch-hunt over the health department people who failed to ensure adequate security at a quarantine base.

**I think that was a good lead.**

**If we stop asking for heads to roll, head-rolling will go out of fashion. Some mistakes need to be tracked down; others we should tolerate, or deal with quietly.**

**If we are kind, we can expect our politicians to follow.**