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Dear Friends,

Several years ago I had a very meaningful conversation with Bishop Smith. I asked him to help me work through a touchy question: When is it appropriate to speak out in church about public issues such as war? Our conversation was wide-ranging. We touched on St. Francis, Anselm, Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., the Presiding Bishop and Bishop of Canterbury. We spent a lot of time talking about Jesus.

At the end of our talk, the Bishop said we must speak out on moral and ethical issues, even when taking a stand is difficult and/or unpopular. Over the years here at Old St. Andrew's, you have heard me support the war to stop the genocide in Kosovo, oppose the war in Iraq, call for international intervention in Rwanda and Darfur.

I try to be consistent in what I understand it means **to be Christian**. It's not always easy. Just now, I need to say more about the national healthcare debate. It is one of those moral and ethical issues about which the Bishop and I spoke.

*One of the scribes came ... and asked him, "Which commandment is the first of all?" Jesus answered, "The first is, 'Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."* (Mark 12.28-31)

Here's the rub. How can any of us seriously profess to follow Jesus without actively supporting universal healthcare and healthcare reform? Which part of "love your neighbor as yourself" exempts the health and care of our neighbors? Jesus does not entertain exceptions, how dare we?

How, too, can any of us seriously love our Creator God and not love what God has created? In both phrases, love (*agapao*) means *to love in a moral sense*. The Hebrew commandments and Jesus' reference to them are uncompromising. Quite simply, the healthcare of all of our citizens is a moral issue!

I won't reargue the whole debate. I will say, however, that the church (the Body of Christ—*that's you and me*) needs to stand on the high moral ground expressed by Jesus.

THE WORD IN THE WILDERNESS

Details about cost may sound important when shouted in protest at a rally. Yet, what about that same protestor when he or she becomes bankrupt because the healthcare system fails him or her? What will he/she say then? I suspect, "Help. I need help."

Cost cannot and should not be the determining factor in whether or not this basic human right is provided. Cost never seems to be a problem when we go to war! Certainly we could have paid for healthcare reform two or three times over with what has been unnecessarily squandered in Iraq.

Healthcare costs are already high and getting higher. In the twelve years I've been at OSA, my healthcare has increased 155%. Likewise, the healthcare cost for the bankrupt protestor and the poor soul who shows up at the Emergency Room without a speck of insurance has increased even more. Regardless, we all pay the price, so why not structure our social responsibility to maximize efficiencies, hold medical professionals and insurance companies accountable, guarantee health security for all, and act as morally motivated citizens (and Christians)?

I've also meditated a lot on what Jesus says here: *"And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.'"* (Matthew 25.40)

I cannot expect anything less of Christian people than to accept the admonition and mandate of Jesus. To fail to do for the least of these is to ignore Christ in the other and certainly in yourself. If you are troubled by making healthcare available to *ALL*, please consider the moral issues at stake.

And lastly, like with unjust war, racism, sexism, slavery and other moral and ethical issues, as a Christian person, I encourage you to speak out boldly. Stand in the fire of justice and give your compassion and love wing so those making important decisions for all of us know that you take seriously who Jesus was and who it is you are and can be.

Blessings & Peace.

*Puck.*