

TRIBALISM IN AMERICA

**A “Jesus follower’s” reflections on politics in America in light of events unfolding in Kenya
By Garry Schmidt**

Watching the unfolding violence in Kenya is shocking and painful, especially since my wife and I have visited there three times and spent two years there on another occasion. Perhaps Kenya, of all the sub-Saharan nations, is the one place that any of us would choose to visit in Africa if we had the chance, until now that is. Day after day we hear news of killings and new forms of brutality as the post-election crisis unfolds. All this is painted against the backdrop of TRIBAL tensions and conflict, conflict between ethnic groups that give primary allegiance to the tribe be it Luo, Luhya, Maasai, Sabaot, Kalenjin, or Kikuyu, to name a few. At first it all sounds so uncivilized and foreign to our sophisticated ears. “How could people do these things to each other?” we ask.

But are we so free of the inner urges that lead to person on person violence? Less than a hundred years ago mob lynching was not uncommon in America. Political assassinations are a familiar part of our recent history. We can smugly claim that these are extreme examples of violence that do not reflect the sentiments of the people at large. Yet are we not guilty of giving allegiance to the interest groups that would promise us access to wealth and power. I suggest that our tribes are Republican, Democrat, white, African American, Hispanic, and one religious group or another. We wouldn’t literally kill those that compete with us for power, but joining others to marginalize (kill) our perceived enemies with slander or innuendo might be quite “OK” if it helps to promote our favorite candidate. There is nothing like an election, when power is up for grabs, to bring out the worst of these impulses, be it an election in Kenya or the contest that is currently being waged in America. Listen to the rhetoric. “Play the race card!”, “He is a closet Moslem!”, or “Flip-flopper!”. We have just begun to witness the verbal violence that is going to escalate up to election time.

Let’s listen to another fountain of POWER, Jesus, our model teacher and example. “Blessed are you when you are persecuted for the sake of righteousness”. When asked how many times we should forgive when sinned against, He responded with an expression that communicated “endlessly”, “Seventy times seven” “Do good to them that abuse you”. “I came to serve, not to be served”, “The Son of Man has no place to lay his head.” His life and words continually communicated a response to life that is totally opposite to the impulses that are imbedded within each of us. How encouraging it is to hear from Kenya that there are Christians from all tribes that are calling for peace and reconciliation. How good it is to be reminded by these good brothers and sisters that we have an allegiance to a King and to a “kingdom that is not of this world”, an allegiance that transcends any earthly interest group that might be tugging at our loyalty.

As we go into our election cycle we should not be surprised when we hear and see the battle being waged with words intended to kill or marginalize an opposition candidate. This is a battle for power after all, not a battle to see who can be the most effective servant. As followers of Jesus, disciples who endeavor to be more and more like Him, we have an opportunity to respond positively as the election contest touches us. We can choose to disbelieve lies and slander. We can choose to speak positively at every opportunity. We can choose, when possible, to put a stop to the rumors and innuendo that impacts our hearing. Most importantly of all, we can daily remind ourselves that, as Jesus-followers, our allegiance is to a kingdom that supersedes the kingdoms of this world. We can constantly remind ourselves that what is broken in this world will not be fixed by the politicians. Washington is not broken, the world is broken and the crack passes through Washington. I am encouraged when I think about the reality that there is a King in heaven who sits on a throne, a King who is vitally interested and involved in the outcome of His creation, and a King who is the ultimate healer of people and of nations. With this in mind, let’s remember to **PRAY FOR KENYA** and **PRAY FOR AMERICA**. Pray that God’s peace and justice will reign.