



## Pastor's Midweek Reflection – October 21, 2020

### How you should vote

Before the inevitable apoplexy sets in, let me assure you that my purpose here is not to endorse or advocate for any particular candidate or ballot measure. I don't intend to give you a pastor-approved slate of candidates or a ballot-ready guide to the God-ordained positions and people that every right thinking Christian should choose. I know that Pat Robertson said on *The 700 Club* just a couple of days ago, that **he** heard a clear word from God about the election, but I am less sanguine about telling you that **I** know about God's specific choices and outcomes.

That said, I am absolutely convinced that as Christians, each one of us should be about the hard work of discernment regarding the intersection of God's will, our discipleship, and our input in the voting process that governs how it is that we live and relate to one another locally, as a nation, and in the community of nations in God's world.

Now I understand that a lot of folks think that church and politics should not come together... ever. Steeped in the tradition of church and state separation, a great many Americans support the idea that each should "stay in their own lane". Let the church constrain itself to addressing the issues of **my** personal salvation and **my** personal walk with Jesus Christ, and stay out of all of that social policy, governance and politics stuff. A retired pastor in my first congregation told me exactly that. He did not see what one realm had to do with the other. I told him, "everything". I still believe it.

But even if you think that there needs to be distance between church and state, and I **do** happen to believe that there are clear benefits to doing so, (I am certainly no fan of replacing liberal democracy with narrow theocracy.) It is spiritually problematic to take that next step, as many do, and separate who you are as a **disciple** of Jesus and a person of faith from who you are and what you do in terms of your civic engagement.

After all, we know that the scriptures proclaim that "the **whole** world is God's, and all that is in it". (**Nehemiah 9:6**) God's Word tells us that God's hegemony extends over heaven and earth and that God is the God of all times, all places, all spaces. (**Acts 17:24-27**). We know that the Kingdom of God that comes to full fruition in the life to come begins now. That's why it is terribly problematic for the Christian not to engage in civic affairs or to do so **without** "bringing one's faith into it".

If it is true that it is in Christ that *we live and move and have our being*, (**Acts 17:28**), then we must be informed by our relationship with Christ even in the civic and political realm. When we head to the voting booth (or the drop box or the mailbox) we must take with us our understanding of who God is, and what God desires for this world. To do otherwise is to proclaim that there are parts of our lives and aspects of this world where God is *not* – a view not at all supported by Scripture.

As you have read through the Bible, I'm sure you could not help but pick up on the fact that Jesus was not just concerned with the next life and the next world, but this life, this world, and these people with whom we share the planet. He sent his disciples not just to teach and preach about the world to come, but to heal and feed and pray for others in this one. Jesus called his disciples to do that, because that is what Jesus himself did. We do well to remember the content of his inaugural sermon – a sermon in which he summarized the ministry he would actually carry out. He said he came to *"Bring good news to the poor, proclaim release to the captives, give recovery of sight to the blind, and let the oppressed go free."* (**Luke 4:18**)

When one votes, one is expressing the values one holds most dear and the beliefs one embraces most closely. It is the individual's expression of their will regarding governance for all. It is an expression how we think we should engage with each other and what we want for the other in this community, this country and the world. For Christians, of course, those values and beliefs should be consistent with the will of God as we understand it and our calling as members of the Body of Christ as revealed in scripture. For Christians, voting really is a "sacred duty."

Now, as I noted earlier, I am not as comfortable as Pat Robertson in telling you about the upcoming election and God's specific ballot choices. I am, however, quite comfortable talking about God's Word and what it reveals about what is important to God as we live in community and the kind of world that God desires for us.

If you are a reader of scripture, you know that there are some foundational themes that emerge as you take in the whole sweep of scripture; themes that if we are to "abide in God's Word... and God's Word in us" as Jesus says in the Gospel of John, will inform our choices. Here are some of those great themes:

**Reconciliation.** In a very real sense, the whole story of God with God's people is about repair, reconciliation, and the mending of relational schisms. From the time of the fall onward, God has been in reconciliation mode. The whole Christ event is about reconciliation and repair of the breach between humankind and God. St. Paul describes it in this way in 2 Corinthians 5: <sup>18</sup>*All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; <sup>19</sup>that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself,\* not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us.*

God's work among us is all about reconciliation in Christ. God has now entrusted the ministry of reconciliation to us. That being the case, before you mark your ballot you should

ask yourself, will my vote further the cause of reconciliation? Will it foster healing and repair? Is it, alternatively, likely to perpetuate divisions, deepen schisms, catalyze societal rupture, lead to greater separation of folks one from another? You might try holding in your mind the conclusion of the parable of the prodigal son, and the father's tearful embrace of the wayward son when he finally returns home utterly shamed. Is that what you see in your mind's eye as you think about the impact of your vote? Does it feel like a Father's longing embrace?

**Compassion and care for all, especially the most vulnerable among us.** You know, I am sure, that scripture portrays our God as one who is obsessed with compassion and care for all, but in particular, those who by virtue of Gender, family circumstance & immigrant status find themselves in a vulnerable state. Nearly 100 times in the Old Testament alone, the scripture speaks this very truth... Deuteronomy 10:17-19 is but one example. *<sup>7</sup>For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who is not partial and takes no bribe, <sup>18</sup>who executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and who loves the strangers, providing them with food and clothing. <sup>19</sup>You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.*

The Jesus we learn about in the scriptures is all about compassionate, gracious treatment of others – especially the most vulnerable. In compassion Jesus restores the shamed to places of honor. In compassion he restores the ostracized to community. In compassion he heals the sick. In compassion he feeds the hungry. In compassion, he even looked upon those who nailed him to the cross and mocked him, and he pleaded with his Father that they be forgiven.

Let me suggest this.... As you are completing your ballot, think about what your vote says about your Godly desire for compassionate treatment of all ...and especially the most vulnerable. You might try reflecting on Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan. Does your contemplated vote conjure up images of the priest and the Levite scurrying past the beaten man, leaving him there in the ditch to rot, or does it feel more like bending down to tend to the poor unfortunate soul, loading him on your donkey and providing for his care?

### **Grace.**

The picture of God that emerges in scripture is a God whose very essence is grace; a God who favors us with enduring love and total commitment that is absolutely unrelated to what it is that we deserve. Paul speaks this truth in Romans 3 *<sup>23</sup>since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; <sup>24</sup>they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus."*

This grace comes as radical counterpoint to the idea of retributive justice. It comes in contradistinction to the practice of giving others only what they have earned. It is the basis of our salvation. It is pure no strings attached gift.

It is also the center of our calling. As members of the Body of Christ in this world, we are to be purveyors of acceptance, full inclusion, honoring and valuing the other not in relation to who and what they are, but who **We** are as grace-filled disciples of Jesus. I would submit

that this is in opposition to the prevailing worldview that is more at home with retribution than grace, and that measures out carefully what the other person deserves, rather than discerning what the other needs...

As you cast your votes, you might ask yourself whether your vote says that you want folks to get their just desserts or, conversely, whether it says you want them to get the strength, hope, support and love that God wants them to have and that they need in order to live.

**Love.**

Maybe this one comes across as being painfully self-evident. I bring it up only because as I hear the words and view the actions of many who claim to be Christian, what is evident to me, is that this fundamental focus on love is not so evident to everyone!

Jesus said *love one another, as I have loved you so you also should love one another*. The question to ask yourself as you vote is, can I make the case that my vote for this person or issue is a clear expression of my love for the other, for the nation, for the community?

Let me leave you with this story from Matthew 22. Perhaps as you reflect on it as a disciple of Jesus, it will be the only voter's guide you need. *"A man came to Jesus and said, 'Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?'* <sup>36</sup>*He said to him, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.'* <sup>37</sup>*This is the greatest and first commandment.* <sup>38</sup>*And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'* <sup>39</sup>*On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.'* <sup>40</sup>

Just in case you missed it, that last verse about the Law and the prophets makes the point that the whole of scripture is fulfilled in these two related directives: To love God fully and to love your neighbor as yourself. As you are completing your ballot, you might take a moment and ask yourself if you could explain your vote as an act of love for those who will be governed by the provisions and people for whom you are casting that ballot.

Pat Robertson was bold to announce a couple of days ago that God gave him specific direction regarding the upcoming vote. I am not going to presume to tell you what God told me about the candidates and issues and which ones you should vote for. But if you look to God's Word, you won't have to listen to my opinions or to Pat's opinions. God will tell you straight up. I suggest that you listen, and vote accordingly.

***Pastor Brown***