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Ephesians 4:17-32
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“Superheroes Need not Apply”

President Ronald Reagan, one time told the story of when he was a teenager, he needed a new pair of boots made.

In those days, you couldn't just go to a shoe store, you went to the shoemaker.

The cobbler asked the young man, “Do you want blunt end toes or pointed end toes?”

Reagan shrugged his shoulders and said, “I don't care, whatever you think.”

When the boots were ready, Reagan examined his new boots and looked at the toes. One of them was flat, the other boot was pointed.

Reagan said, “How can I wear a pair of boots like this?”

The cobbler said, “You said you didn't care.”

From that day on, Reagan said “If you don't make a decision about the things that matter the most to you, somebody else is going to make them for you.”

In two days we will need to make some decisions that will affect us the next four years and probably beyond.

Election day is November 8th. Some of you will vote. Some of you will not.

Those of you who vote may not like the outcome. Those of you who do not vote will be forced to live with the outcome.

It seems that we have come down to two choices. I suppose you could write in a name or vote for third party candidate but we all know that one of those two will be our next president.

Unfortunately, the support of these two candidates have been divisive.

Friends and families have suffered broken relationships over bitter arguments about these two.

Even the church has become divided with some denominations leaning strongly toward one or the other.

Now, I know some of you may have already voted and some may not be able to vote, however, I hope what I have to say this morning will still be of benefit to all!

Today I am going to preach an *Election Day Sermon*. So, what is an election day sermon?

Well, an *Election Day Sermon* has its roots buried back in the 18th and 19th Centuries in America when, either on the Sunday before Election Day, the day of the election, or on both days, preachers would deliver messages called "Election Day sermons."

Although, most of us spend many hours each week watching television or spending time on the internet, in 18th-century America the most important form of public oral communication (even entertainment) was the "sermon."

The average weekly churchgoer listened to over 7,000 sermons in a lifetime. That's an average of almost three sermons a week for 50 years – at usually over two hours a pop!

And you think you have it bad!

Election Day Sermons were a great literary genre.

Often, the brimstone was so hot that an *Election Day Sermon* was the one sermon a minister might be remembered by.

There was a good reason for that. No words were minced. He entered the pulpit and for the next two hours - count your blessings, folks - proclaimed a jeremiad.

Anybody know what a jeremiad is? It is actually a word, meaning a loud mournful lamentation.

Think, Jeremiah, the great Hebrew prophet.

Here's how it went. *The world has gone, or is about to go to Hell. The reason is simple. God is punishing you for your sins.*

Whatever is wrong in this world is wrong because you are wrong-headed, wrong-hearted, inattentive to God's commandments.

And God is watching and God is angry, and if you keep on messing up you will burn forever.

Usually, they only burned for two long hours.

Nonetheless, by the end of the pastor's jeremiad, almost everyone who listened did, in fact, feel at least partially responsible for everything that was going wrong in the world.

No more "throw the bums out." The bums were us.

Unfortunately, in passing judgment, the early Puritan preachers, in their demands for moral perfection, too often forgot the importance of forgiveness: of loving-kindness; of self-acceptance; of honest doubts.

But they did remind us that, despite our failings, we are accountable. They didn't let us pass the buck while complaining that somebody else was diminishing its value.

Now, I promise not to give you a two-hour sermon, and I'm not going to tell you who to vote for (unless you ask me privately later ☺).

I'm not even going to tell you that everything wrong with this country is your fault and the result of God's responsive wrath.

So relax!

That said, in the spirit, if not the letter, of our Puritan forebears let me share the following.

Both the candidates for office are flawed people. I accept that. I want a flawed person in the White House, but one who knows that he or she is flawed.

The reason is simple. The president will be less dangerous. Certitude, moral and otherwise, is blind.

We all look for leaders to have a sense of purpose, but I think we should also look for a quality of non-certainty.

Only a fanatic is certain that he or she is always right.

Genuine commitment, on the other hand, always co-exists with some element of questioning and uncertainty.

I also recognize and accept that great leaders are not naturally exceptional in many cases.

They are people who work hard and who make a habit of life-long learning and personal growth.

I have a great admiration for leaders who are not afraid to change their minds based on new knowledge or understanding.

My vote on Nov. 8th will go to a flawed human being.

But, it will also go to the candidate I believe will build the strongest team around them.

And who can effectively tackle issues that I care about and that reflect my faith.

As I consider who to vote for (ok, in the spirit of full disclosure, I decided on who to vote for months ago), and see all they have to go through to get the , I have to wonder, “Who on Earth could genuinely want that job!?”

I mean, we have to know as compassionate people that no matter what promises the candidates make, the fact is that they are taking on impossible jobs, really.

Whoever achieves the highest office in the land will be bitterly complained about, mercilessly lampooned, accused of being a failed messiah by disappointed supporters...

... and derided by certain heads of state no matter what they do, no matter how hard they work, and no matter how fine and upstanding a human being they may turn out to be.

Of course, I expect, both have some work to do in that area.

It reminds me of the story about the stretch limo, full of politicians, that was taking a back route down a two-lane country road late at night.

The limo ran into a bad storm, and slid off the wet pavement at high speed. It flipped over a few times, and finally crashed into a tractor in the middle of a field.

The owner of the farm heard the noise and went out to see what happened. After checking out the scene, he used his tractor to bury the passengers.

The next afternoon the county deputy was passing and saw the wrecked limo, which had been reported as missing.

He asked the farmer what happened, and the farmer let him know he'd buried all the politicians.

The deputy asked, "Were you certain they were all dead?"

"Well," said the farmer, "a few of them claimed they weren't, but you know politicians, you can't believe a word they say" ...

And that makes it hard when you are trying to figure out who and what to vote for!

The political process ought to be one that has as a central goal the reconciliation of the American people. But political professionals have found that the easiest way to get votes is to divide people.

That makes this a pretty disheartening time of year.

There are too many times that with great certainty, religious leaders announce what God's position is on an issue or how they believe God would vote for a candidate.

Our faith ought to be free of such political distinctions. God is not a Republican or a Democrat (although I imagine he may lean to one side or the other).

The sad truth is, Christians in the United States are some of the most divided people you'll ever run across. Hot button social issues rip us apart.

And it may be simply impossible for us to find common ground on some controversial issues.

But are there issues that a large majority of Christians can agree with as we prepare to vote?

In 2004, leaders from the National Council of Churches USA
*(a body representing many mainline and orthodox
Christian denominations - including the PCUSA)*
sat down together and wondered where Christians of all stripes might find such common ground during the elections.

They agreed on a set of principles and then encouraged their member churches to consider them as they prepared to vote.

I believe they are as relevant today as they were twelve years ago.

They are as follows:

1. **War is contrary to the will of God.** While the use of violent force may, at times, be a necessity of last resort, Christ pronounces his blessing on the peacemakers. We look for political leaders who will make peace with justice a top priority and who will actively seek nonviolent solutions to conflict.

2. **God calls us to live in communities shaped by peace and cooperation.**

We reject policies that abandon large segments of our inner city and rural populations to hopelessness.

We look for political leaders who will re-build our communities and bring an end to the cycles of violence and killing.

3. God created us for each other, and thus our security depends on the well-being of our global neighbors.

We look for political leaders for whom a foreign policy based on cooperation and global justice is an urgent concern.

4. God calls us to be advocates for those who are most vulnerable in our society.

We look for political leaders who yearn for economic justice and who will seek to reduce the growing disparity between rich and poor.

5. Each human being is created in the image of God and is of infinite worth.

We look for political leaders who actively promote racial justice and equal opportunity for everyone.

6. The earth belongs to God and is intrinsically good.

We look for political leaders who recognize the earth's goodness, champion environmental justice, and uphold our responsibility to be stewards of God's creation.

7. Christians have a biblical mandate to welcome strangers.

We look for political leaders who will pursue fair immigration policies and speak out against xenophobia.

8. Those who follow Christ are called to heal the sick.

We look for political leaders who will support adequate, affordable and accessible health care for all.

9. Because of the transforming power of God's grace, all humans are called to be in right relationship with each other.

We look for political leaders who seek a restorative, not retributive, approach to the criminal justice system and the individuals within it.

10. Providing enriched learning environments for all of God's children is a moral imperative.

We look for political leaders who advocate for equal educational opportunity and abundant funding for children's services.

What do you think? Do these ten items speak to you?

On what promises to be an historic occasion, the choice we must make, not just with our vote, but with our lives, is really a choice between hope and fear.

Hate is not love's opposite, fear is. When we are frightened, by others, by life itself, we cannot love.

We can hide. We can fight. But we cannot love. Conversely, love casts out fear.

We are good at fear, aren't we? That's why politicians play on our fears.

Fear gives power to others, and inspires us to try to take power away from them.

Fear divides, weakens and then conquers us. It feeds on our weakness and envy and jealousy.

It leads us to follow those who tell us we are victims. It closes hearts and poisons minds.

Fear creates scapegoats. Jews, gays, feminists, blacks, immigrants: take your pick.

I don't know about you, but, I want my president to inspire hope. I want her or him to give me faith.

And I certainly want him or her to encourage me to open my heart to love.

I ask a lot because our founders and early leaders asked no less of us.

Abraham Lincoln, who evoked in us "the better angels of our nature," put it this way:

"The question is not whether God is on our side, but whether we are on the side of God."

The United States of America is the most daring experiment in democratic governance that has ever been fashioned. Our responsibilities are equal to its promise.

It is very possible that today in other churches ministers are standing up and telling their parishioners that God wants them to vote one way or another on the different ballot measures and maybe even on the races for public office.

Truthfully, there are plenty of times that I myself look at different ballot measures and think that God must surely be opposed (or in favor) of this one or that one.

And as an individual – not as a church representative – I sometimes lend my name to different causes. But here is how I approach these issues:

I tell people that after prayerfully considering and studying the different measures and candidates that I have made my decisions on how to vote based on my understanding of where God is calling me and our society.

What I do not do is insist that my understanding of these issues is the only true Christian understanding.

We need to take seriously the Prophet Micah's call for us to walk humbly with our God.

I have great faith in our system of government. I love this country and its people. I hope for our future.

Yes, I have my doubts. And I have my fears. All of us do. Yet my faith and hope are strong.

We, who already have so much, will somehow muster the capacity to rise to historic occasions such as this one.

If we and our leaders can somehow rise beyond politics as usual to meet this momentous challenge, November eighth will not mark the end of this election. It will mark its beginning.

And the world will change...

But not only that, we will also elect senators, congressmen and women, councilmen and women, and pass propositions that can have a huge impact on our community, city, state, and country!

Tuesday, this country will elect a new president. I know that you will make your choices carefully and according to your deepest values and feelings.

And so, I am going to ask one thing of you as you prepare to go to the polls, and it is an unusual request.

In your own fashion, I ask that you pray for these candidates (all of them), and for this country.

For whoever it is that is inaugurated in January of 2017, he or she, has a truly Herculean task ahead of them – and neither Hillary Clinton nor Donald Trump can save America all by themselves.

We are not electing a superhero; we are electing a human being.

To quote Adlai Stevenson, “Who leads us is less important than what leads us — what convictions, what courage, what faith — win or lose.”

Grant us wisdom, grant us courage, for the living of these days, for the living of these days.

Amen!