

What the Bible Says about...How to Vote
Psalm 146
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Kory Wilcoxson

I spent the last week in Phoenix at a preaching conference. I hesitate to tell you this because I don't want you to get your hopes up today. You may be aware there's an election in a few days and Arizona is a key state in determining our next president. But they also have a number of local elections going on, so I saw more political signs than cacti. There were literally dozens of signs on every corner. Vote for this person, don't vote for that person. One sign actually quoted an expletive from one of the candidates as a reason not to vote for him. And, I assume, when the election is over, all those signs go to the landfill.

Blessedly, we're almost at the end of this political season. On Tuesday, we'll go to the polls and pull our levers or darken our circles or punch our chads and we'll elect our leaders, including our new president – which may make some of us want to punch something else besides our ballot. For the last few weeks, we've been looking at what the Bible has to say to us about fundamental issues like justice and love as a way of centering ourselves as we approach the voting booth.

Now, on this Sunday before Election Day, what should we talk about? There's probably a good portion of you that think the last thing we should talk about is politics. As I heard one congregation member say this week when they read the sermon title, "I already know how to vote, so I guess I don't have to come on Sunday!" A few notable examples aside, most pastors and churches make it their business NOT to be political, sticking to the things of God's realm and leaving the politics to the experts.

That assumes, of course, that politics are outside of God's realm. I firmly believe in the separation of church and state, but not in the separation of faith and politics. As author Phillip Gulley wrote, "The question is not whether we should mix Christianity and politics. To follow Jesus is to be political." I believe to say otherwise is to excuse your faith from informing your politics, which is a slippery slope. When you take faith out of it, you can justify voting for just about anything. Every contentious issue and disputed policy is a part of God's realm, and our faith should inform every corner of our lives, including our politics, so we can't get away with ignoring it.

By connecting our faith and our politics, we're simply following the lead of Jesus, who very much engaged the political leaders of his time, standing up to the ruling powers like King Herod, Pontius Pilate, even the emperor. After Jesus' death, his followers picked up the mantle, continuing to be a subversive presence, a thorn in the side of the powers-that-be. Imagine, a group of rag-tag people, mostly women and slaves, going up against the Roman Empire. Pretty easy to figure out who'll win that one, right? But as author John Ortberg says, "Today we give our kids biblical names and we call our dogs Caesar and Nero." There's no Roman Empire in sight, but that rag-tag band of followers is still going strong and is still called to engage their faith in the political process.

So, the question we face as Christians this first week of November is, "How to vote?" Notice, the question is not "Who do we vote for?" That's not my business to tell you the answer to that question. As Disciples of Christ, we believe everyone is able to figure out for themselves who to vote for, and we can still ride our elephants and donkeys right up to the communion table

and share a meal together in Jesus' name. No, the question before us is, "How do I vote?" What I mean is, "In what spirit should I approach this civic responsibility?"

As we should always do when faced with social, moral, or ethical conundrums, we turn to scripture, not for black-and-white answers, but for guidance. Our psalm today says, "Do not put your trust in princes, in mortals, in whom there is no help. When their breath departs they return to the earth; on that very day their plans perish. Happy are those whose hope is in the Lord their God." Hope seems to be a scarce commodity these days. And yet, as followers of Christ, we are called to be a light to the darkness of this world, to shine our beacon of hope into the blackness of despair.

So how do we witness to our hope in God as we live out our political passion? How do our faith and our politics inform each other? And how much does a candidate's faith matter to our decision? There's a whole policy vs. character debate in this year's election. Does character matter? Does a candidate's faith matter? Would you vote for an atheist who had sound policies? What about a candidate who claims to be Christian but says and does things that are blatantly un-Christ-like? How do we know which candidate will best help our country?

I once posed the question on Facebook about what a sermon on voting should and shouldn't say, and got some very interesting responses, including this one: "I would hope a sermon on voting would say, 'Don't vote for the person who will most help you; vote for the person who will most help everyone'." Now, the joy of this whole process is that we all have some widely varying opinions about which candidates can be the most help. That's the beauty of living in a free country. But I think that's a great place to start, because it mirrors for me what God's kingdom looks like: a place where everyone belongs, everyone is welcomed, and no one lacks for what they need. Is that possible here on earth? Maybe. But it takes an intentional commitment to unity, to not tearing each other down or judging each other based on our political choice.

While visiting America from France, Alexis de Tocqueville wrote, "America is great because America is good. And if America ever ceases to be good, it will cease being great." That was written in the 1830s, just a few years before Donald Trump chose "Make America Great Again" as his campaign slogan. Now, we could argue whether or not America is still great, was ever great, or ever stopped being great. But I'd rather expend my energy on making America good. And that doesn't start with Trump or Kamala Harris. That starts with you and me.

So today, a few days before the election, let's begin here. Some of us are blue, some of us are red. This has nothing to do with basketball; I'm not sure even God can bridge that divide. On Tuesday, or sometime thereafter, one of those groups – either red or blue – is going to win and one of those groups is going to lose, and there is the potential for our country to become more divided than ever. Will we be red or blue? And, more importantly, which side is God on?

That's a provocative question, isn't it? Because both sides claim God. Both sides have invoked the name of Christ in their campaign speeches. Both sides have courted the Christian vote. One side will tell you their candidate has been handpicked by God, the other side will tell you that candidate is the anti-Christ. They can't both be right. So, which side is God on?

Psalms 146 says, "The Lord sets the prisoners free; the Lord opens the eyes of the blind. The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down; the Lord loves the righteous. The Lord watches over the strangers, he upholds the orphan and the widow." How do we vote? We vote for candidates that will best help accomplish those goals. Abraham Lincoln is quoted as saying, "my concern is not whether God is on our side; my greatest concern is to be on God's side, for God is

always right.” As we employ our faith to help us make wise choices at the polls, maybe that’s a place to start, to strive to be on God’s side.

I know. I know which side God is on. God is on the side of justice. God is on the side of mercy. God is on the side of honoring the lives of all people. God is on the side of not treating people like animals. God is on the side of not dehumanizing. God is on the side of collaboration, not competition. God is on the side of kindness, not cruelty. God is on the side of peace, not hatred. My personal plan is to vote for the candidate that most closely exhibits these qualities in both their policies and their character. I know no one does that perfectly, that’s where grace comes in. Which side is God on? I don’t know. But the real question for me is which candidate is most on God’s side?

Red. Blue. You know what happens when you mix red and blue? You get purple. Purple is an interesting color, and very spiritual. Liturgically, purple is the color of royalty, symbolizing God’s reign. Purple is also the color for the season of Lent, a color of repentance and the acknowledgement that we are only human. And in just a few weeks, we’ll put up the purple paraments for the season of Advent, a season that is marked by the hope brought to us by the birth of Christ.

So, on Wednesday, I believe we should all commit to stop being red or blue, and instead become purple people. Not purple people eaters, but purple people. We should step over the lines that divide us and commit to working together to make America good again, or more good than it already is. Let’s not take to Facebook or take to the streets or move to Canada. Instead, let’s commit to doing everything in our power to change this world for the better. Let’s blend our red and blue differences into a radiant purple that reflects God’s reign, that honors each other’s humanity, that rekindles the hope the Christ child brings, and that shows our world that we serve someone far greater than the princes and princesses of this world.

On Tuesday, let’s vote for the people we believe will do the best job of leading our country. And then on Wednesday, let’s take all the passion and fervor and energy that we’ve been putting into either rooting for someone, rooting against someone, or complaining about the whole process in general, and put it to use in showing Christ’s love to the world. How should you vote? You should vote with the hopes of making this country a little more like the kin-dom of God. And then you should go out and do your part to make that happen.