

“Who Gets Your Vote?”

Revelation 21:1-6a, John 11:32-44

All Saints Observed

Nov. 1, 2020

You know, sometimes I think politicians are at their best when they offer up humor. Some of you will remember, after President Reagan was shot and was being wheeled into the operating room for emergency surgery, he managed to say to the medical team gathered there, *“I hope you are all Republicans!”* You may remember another of his most famous lines, *“The most terrifying words in the English language are ‘I’m from the Government...and I’m here to help!’”*

Brothers and sisters, in two days our nation goes to the polls. And even though today is “All Saint’s Day,” the traditional “birthday of the Church,” I want to talk a bit about the upcoming election, but within the context of how we who call ourselves Christians are, in fact, “saints” by virtue of Christ’s death, resurrection and our decision to follow Him as Savior and Lord.

You and I have been badgered and battered by ads, polls and policy-mongering for what seems like years. And mercifully, for a while anyway, by Wednesday morning (we hope) it all comes to an end. My guess is that some of you, as you are being wheeled into the years 2021 and beyond, are hoping what President Reagan hoped: for more Republicans! Some of you will feel completely the opposite way, and some of you—perhaps most of us—are just tired, weary and want it all to end.

Before I go on, ***let me give my chief political endorsement.*** Here it is: if you have not already done so, then please vote! I think it is not just important to vote, it is a right and an incredible privilege that you and I have a say in the choice of our leaders. Do not neglect and do not forsake this incredible privilege. Aside from that endorsement, I think there is some real wisdom to ponder in the words of the former Democratic Senator, George Mitchell, who liked to quip, *“Although he is regularly asked to do so, God does not take sides in American politics.”*

You have heard me say that I do not use the pulpit to discuss politics and that is true. Yet when it comes to the most important matters before us, I really want you to ask yourself, “***Who should get your vote?***”

Four years ago, my guess is that most of us cast our vote. Some have been pleased with who was elected and some not. In any case, whether we look to the past or to the future, if we put our internal hope, our deepest desires and our most extravagant dreams in the outcome of a presidential election, ***we are going to be disappointed, every single time.*** It is clear from Scripture that this world, as long as it is infected and enslaved by human sin and brokenness, will not ever be perfect. Regardless of who is elected Tuesday—months from now, perhaps years from now—there will still be economic trials, pockets of inequality and injustice, and challenges to world peace. We will not experience the fullness of heaven—on this side of heaven.

So in a sense, this fragile earth, our island home, is our temporary place, but not our permanent one. It is a place where we see glimpses of God and His Kingdom and can even take part in making that a reality, but God is not yet fully revealed nor is His kingdom.

We see this in the Gospel lesson. The raising of Lazarus was an ***anomaly in Jesus’ ministry.*** Jesus did not heal every person he encountered, nor did He raise everyone from the dead. There was no “population explosion” during Jesus days on earth because He was walking about cracking open tombs and unwrapping mummies or digging up graves and resuscitating corpses. Lazarus’ raising was a “*glimpse,*” a reminder that you can witness pockets of the Kingdom here, but not all of it because the greater Kingdom, the eternal kingdom, the everlasting Kingdom, rests beyond the grave.

This is precisely what we see in the “glimpse” of the Kingdom yet to come from the Revelation to John, “*...And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them as their God; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.’ And the one who was seated on the throne said, ‘See, I am making all things new.’”*

And then an important, perhaps THE most important, line: God’s word to John: “*It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the*

*end.” And right there in those words, we are told **for Whom our most important vote should be.***

What are just a few implications of that word with regard to the election? ***First, since God is the Alpha and the Omega, only God deserves praise.*** Let me say that again—***only God deserves praise.*** There is a difference between thanks and praise; ***we give both to God.***

Yet there is a line to be drawn ***between ‘thanks’ and ‘praise’*** when it comes to humankind. Today, we often see praise lavished on pop-stars and sports heroes, but also on those who may take political stands with which we agree, ***but praise is reserved for God.*** Lavish admiration should be reserved for God alone. Four years from now, we do it all again. Presidents have term limits, the ***eternal sovereignty of God is a leadership position that has no term limits.*** When we offer praise, we are saying that God is God, and ***we are not.*** And frankly, neither is Donald Trump or Joe Biden.

Second, do not expect a candidate to make you happy. With all the energy that has gone into this presidential campaign, we can certainly understand voters wanting their candidate to bring them joy and satisfaction. Yet that is really unrealistic and it is often a recipe for disappointment. Whether the victor is a Republican or Democrat, the winner is going to let down large numbers of his or her supporters.

Yet, there is another path to take toward happiness: ***unreserved confidence in God.*** “*Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob...whose hope is in the Lord their God,*” the Psalmist tells us.¹ Better for us to look for happiness in relationship with the Lord God, the One Who made heaven and Earth, and who is eternally faithful. God is the source of every good and perfect gift and is a Lord who always keeps promises. With God, we have ***a leader who can be trusted to provide for us and who never flip-flops.***

Even more, when we focus on our relationships with God, we find happiness within ourselves. When we look to God to bring us happiness, we begin to find authentic joy and satisfaction, which secures us even when our leaders disappoint.

Third, take the long view. If you buy into the reality that a candidate will not make you happy, then please buy into the reality that a new year will not necessarily make all your dreams come through either. When I was born,

¹ Psalm 146:5-6.

JFK was in office; and my hunch is that with the trifecta of challenges presented by Russia, Cuba and Vietnam, not to mention the growing threat of economic challenges, racial tensions and nuclear annihilation, many Americans felt those were “scary days.”

And, let’s be honest, these are scary days too. I don’t have to list the external assaults to our internal peace; we know them all too well. We are all hoping and praying for better days. I think most of us cannot wait for 2021.

Yet as long as I have lived, I have met and heard people live their entire lives saying, “*Maybe next year will be better, different.*” Maybe it will; maybe it won’t. If you are joyful on election night, don’t get overly elated. And if you are disappointed when the election is over, don’t get too depressed. The next presidential campaign will begin the next morning, Nov. 4.

As Christians, the most important leader in our lives is Almighty God. When we focus and lay our hopes on Him, and when we give our trust and give our lives to Him, and in His Son Jesus Christ, then we are joining a community of faithful people who are linked together across the generations. You and I have lived through countless political victories and defeats, and numerous times of national celebration and heartache.

Election days may be divisive and difficult, but they should not prevent us from looking to God together and taking the long view of human history.

So, **first**—only God deserves praise, be careful about pouring that on a candidate; **second**—do not expect a candidate to make you happy; **third**—take the long view.

Lastly, fourth, put your trust in the eternal. Psalm 146 counsels us, “*Do not put your trust in princes, mortals, in whom there is no help. When their breath departs, they return to the earth; on that very day their plans perish.*”²

We take a chance when we rely on political leaders to help us because they are flawed, weak, biased, transitory and limited like any other human being.

They are broken and sinful, like you and me. Some are more gifted than others; some make outstanding leaders, others horrific; others don’t make

² Psalm 146:3-4.

much of a difference at all, but our complete faith should be directed not toward a politician, but toward the Eternal Maker of Heaven and Earth.

This year, as you know, there has been a big “push” from all sides to vote. I have seen more T-shirts, hats and even bumper stickers with simply the word “VOTE.” And, by all accounts, the push has worked. More have voted early than perhaps ever in our nation’s history; hopefully more will show up to the polls Tuesday than ever. That is a good thing—more voices, more boots on the ground, making their voice known—that’s what we prize and it is what we want in a democracy.

Yet I don’t think I’ll ever forget seeing what was written on a T-shirt of a young man that I spotted during the last election four years ago: two simple red words on the front of his black T-shirt, “*Vote Jesus.*”

You know, there is a lot competing for Jesus these days, not the least of which is the belief some have that their political candidate is the next best thing to Jesus, if not even better. Yet recalling that young man’s witness that day was but a simple reminder that really, when it comes down to it, ***Christians are always to vote for the eternal.***

Jesus raised Lazarus not just to reveal God’s power, but to remind us of what is to come. God welcomed John into His revelatory vision, not just to inspire, but to remind all who would read his words that there is an Alpha and an Omega, a beginning and an end; and that He, and He alone, is the source for your happiness, your joy, your peace—your hope.

We Christians are always people of hope. Before his death, Martin Luther King, Jr. said with hope, “*I have seen the promised land. And I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight that we, as a people, will get to the promised land....I’m happy tonight. I’m not worried about anything. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord.*”

Before he took his last breath, Ludwig Van Beethoven, who was deaf, said with hope, “*I shall hear in heaven.*”

Before he was executed by the Nazis, Lutheran pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s last words were words of hope: “*This is the end, but for me, it is the beginning.*”

Hope—hope that is seen in glimpses here in this world and hope in what rests beyond this world—is the very reason we should not just sing, but hold fast to Martin Luther’s words that we just shared;

“A mighty Fortress is Our God...

...Let goods and kindred go,

This mortal life also;

The body they may kill:

God’s truth abideth still;

His kingdom is forever...”

Our kingdom—our fortress—will not be defeated by an election, by a party, by policy or by anything this world has to offer—not even by death itself. Our Fortress, our hope and our peace rests in the almighty, everlasting victorious kingdom of God and His Son, the Ruler of all things in Heaven and Earth—Jesus Christ.

No friends...if you are looking for Tuesday to bring you everlasting peace, you are looking in the wrong place. You will be sorely disappointed. Yet if you are looking to the Alpha and the Omega, if you are trusting in Jesus Christ, if you rely on His Holy Spirit—***if your vote is for Jesus***—you will have hope borne within you ***that you cannot hold but will take hold of you!***

We do not know what the next President will bring, nor do we know what 2021 will bring. We do know what Jesus brings: ***life, peace and salvation, and that will see us through.***

I love that prayer by Thomas Merton, “*My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do I really know myself ... Therefore I will trust You always though I may seem to be lost and...I will not fear, for You are ever with me, and You will never leave me...*”³

My friends, today is “*All Saints Day.*”

We believe that the word “saint” is not reserved for just the best of Jesus’ followers, but for ALL of them. We believe that all those who have chosen and who choose to follow Jesus are saints. That includes, as the song goes, those who “***mean to be one too.***” ***If you mean to “be one,” God will take you up on the offer.***

³ From *Thoughts of Solitude.*

Just a few Sundays ago, I stood at our font and baptized a little baby, testifying to the birth of new faith and new life in Christ. During this COVID season, I have gathered several times with families around gravesites, or in front of St. Martin's at burial niches near the Wayside Chapel, as we lay to rest beloved saints of God, testifying to the hope to which we Christians cling: in Christ, life is changed, not ended.

When we do these kinds of things, we Christ followers, we Saints of God, are visibly saying we believe in the eternal. It is the Christian way of poking a finger in the eye of the ills of the world and saying, "*Regardless of what the devil throws at us, we will still keep hoping, believing and trusting in the eternal.*" ***We will still keep voting for Jesus*** and when we do, we will be blessed prisoners of hope. What does that mean?

Let me close with these beautiful words of C.S. Lewis: "*At present we are on the outside of the world, the wrong side of the door. We discern the freshness and purity of morning, but they do not make us fresh and pure. We cannot mingle with the splendours we see. But all the leaves of the New Testament are rustling with the rumour that it will not always be so. Someday, God willing, we shall get in....Nature is mortal; we shall outlive her. When all the suns and nebulae have passed away, each one of you will still be alive...We are summoned to pass in through [this world/Nature], beyond her, into that splendor which she fitfully reflects.*"

My brothers and sisters, soon we go to the polls to pick a President, but each day beckons us to cast our vote for Who matters most.

So, well, who gets your vote?

I think that young man's T-shirt had it right: '***Vote Jesus.***' Vote Jesus again and again and again.

Amen.