

For the people of St. Philip's  
Proper 27  
November 9, 2008  
Maria Hoecker, preacher  
Joshua 24: 1-3a, 14-25.

This has been quite a week in the life of our nation. Another political election has come and gone. Millions and millions of dollars were spent for what came down to a single day when the votes were tallied and electors selected. As I stood with Chloe and Max to vote in front of the electronic touch screen last Tuesday, with my finger poised to make my virtual mark, I felt the enormity of the moment. As we walked over to the polling place, Max reminded Chloe and me that "every vote matters." It was the last thing he said as he fell asleep that night.

It does matter.

And now we deal with the aftermath of the elections. Some candidates were declared winners and others gave graceful concession speeches. We all had our favorites, now some are in and some are out. For some the last eight years have stung, and for others the next four years will sting.

It's long been assumed that we vote for candidates out of how we see ourselves. We project ourselves onto our candidates. If our chosen candidate wins, we feel validated~ if our candidate loses, we feel betrayed. It's a slippery slope, when we over-identify with our leaders, we have to be careful what qualities or demerits we project onto any given candidate. It may not really be about them, but about us. Political leaders are human beings, after all, not gods or demons. Sometimes our membership in political parties takes on a mythic quality. Like with sports teams, we cheer for our home team and hope for God to grant favor to the victors. We get perhaps a bit too over-identified with the pack.

So how do we sit with all that this morning as Christians? Where do we fit into the game plan that is unfolding for our country – post election? In the OT reading this morning it says "Far be it from us that we should forsake the LORD to serve other Gods; for it is the LORD our God who brought us and our ancestors up from the Land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, and who did those great signs in our sight." (Joshua 24: ) Far be it for us to serve other Gods.

Last week for All Saints' Sunday we heard the Beatitudes from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount.

The Sermon on the Mount was Jesus' platform, his position paper. Jesus described a way to order our common life ... a way to live together if we are serious about living out God's claim upon us. In it, he issues an ethical summons to feed the hungry, clothe the naked and challenge the powers and principalities. All too aware of our human inclination for indifference to the plight of others, Jesus defined a way of life that is oriented, not to the "I" with whom we are each so absorbed, but to the "Thou" the neighbor, the other, the foreigner, the stranger.

In that address he didn't inspire his hearers to war, he didn't get their blood boiling or pump his fist or wag his finger ... he blessed peacemakers.

He didn't call upon us to get our enemies in our sites and track them down, he blessed the merciful.

He didn't praise the mighty – those with armies and war rooms, with nuclear weapons and oil – he praised the meek and said that, despite the evidence, it is they who will inherit the earth.

He said that to live this way was not only to be blessed, but to BE a blessing in our meekness. To live that way, together and for each other, is to be as light to a world plunged in the darkness of violence and despair.

Whether you voted and how you voted, really isn't the point this morning. It is unlikely that either your vote or my vote will usher in the kingdom of God. But what we can do – what we are obligated to do by our Christian faith – is to vote to strengthen the common good.

We need not shrink from bringing God and faith to bear upon our life together as a nation and as a city. After all, it was God who instructed Moses to lobby Pharaoh, Egypt's head of state. God sent Moses to intervene in public affairs on behalf of an oppressed people. A God who sends people to liberate slaves is a God who is hip deep in our moral and political lives. This is a God who stretches out a hand to the poorest of the poor and the most wretched and who assures them: you are not forgotten. And, who backs up that assurance with release from captivity and with food to nourish their bodies.

Part of what the Bible provides is a playbook on how to lead both our private and our public lives. If we are compassionate to the people we encounter and if we are concerned with justice above all else in community affairs then it is said we are building up God's Kingdom.

The political process ought to be one that has as a central platform for the reconciliation of the American people. But political professionals have found that the easiest way to get votes is to divide people. This can be a 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 favor a particular candidate. Our faith ought to be free of such political distinctions. God is not a Republican or a Democrat, and Christianity is not liberal or conservative. Those are modern political terms. Sadly, some have tried to co-opt Christianity to advance their partisan political agendas. All Christians need to guard against that.

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 simply be impossible for us to find common ground on some controversial issues. But single issue diatribes are a distraction from the real work we have ahead of us. No one party or candidate or elected official is going to be the savior or demon of our democracy. If we attach those attributes to them, we are setting them up for failure. We all are a part of the process. Our leaders merely reflect back to us who we are. We all are part of a never-ending succession of those who have come before us and those who are yet to come.

The election is over, but the work continues. Now is the time for we as Christians to take up our place in this time and in our own voices proclaim the radically Good News of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The election is over, but the work continues. To disengage during these times would be turning our backs on God. There is simply too much war, too many children dying of hunger in a rich world, too much global pollution, and too much suffering for us to stay silent and risk nothing. The world right now needs people who are committed to God's justice and mercy. Now more than ever we need to be fully engaged in this nation and in the world, proclaimers of Christ's mission for reconciliation in the world.

Together, as One in the Body of Christ, let us answer God's call. At the end of the OT reading today we hear Joshua say to the people of Israel, "...Put away the foreign gods that are among you, and incline your hearts to the LORD, the God of Israel. And the people said to Joshua, "the LORD our God we will serve, and him we will obey." It's a declaration, not of independence, but of dependence. We as Christians cannot make false gods and idols out of our political friends and enemies. We are the hopeful ones who have one God, through Jesus Christ. It's a rock on which we stand that transcends the news of this or any day.

As did the people in Joshua's audience, we can make our own "Declaration of Dependence" and echo their refrain, "We will serve the Lord".