

I. Set Up.

A. I suppose it's possible that someone here today is unaware that there is an election this week. If that is you, please do tell us how you do it! That seems like a life-skill I would like to learn!

B. That was a joke. As Christ followers, we do not seek to hide or escape from the issues of the day. And as Americans, we should appreciate that – whatever we may think about the choices we have – we have choices. Many live in countries without any. That was certainly the situation faced by the New Testament church. They did not vote for Herod, or Pilate or Nero or any of the others that terrorized them. Indeed, they prayed for them and looked for ways to be good citizens of the City of Man, even as they recognized their ultimate allegiance in the City of God.

C. Today we will pray for our country and Mike will share a message about how we should think about the election that he has been working on for most of a year.

II. Introduction

A. I am aware that at this moment – at this point in the election season – you did not come to church to hear someone talk about politics. “Please, anything. Talk about money. Give me an hour sermon in which you parse Greek verbs. Speak about the importance of the Book of Leviticus. Anything. Talk about anything but the election.” We are exhausted.

1. Perhaps there are one or two of you still animated by this. A few political junkies who live for the tweets and spin and wait anxiously for the latest polling numbers.

2. But most of us want it to go away. We'd like our lives back. We just want a world that works. We want to get along. We want an end to the anger and political toxicity.

3. Besides, hasn't everything that could possibly be said been said – one hundred times. Hasn't it all been written, shouted, tweeted and debated?

B. You do not want to hear about the election.

C. Let me assure you, I am not here to talk about the election. I am not here as a cultural or political analyst. I am here as a pastor. My goal is not to say anything you might hear on whichever end of the news spectrum you are dialed into. I want to offer some words of perspective from Scripture.

III. Over a year ago, I started thinking and praying about what I would say in the weeks immediately before and immediately after the election.

A. It seemed to me then – and as a reference point, this was way before recent events. This was back when Bernie Sanders was ahead of Joe Biden in the polls. This was before COVID, George Floyd, Sheltering-in-place and Ruth Bader Ginsburg's death. It was before 2020 started.

B. Back then it seemed to me that this was going to be a particularly tense moment, and that our stability as a nation would be under unique strain. And that it would be an ideal time for the church to drink from the deep wells of Scripture. And so I started to think and pray about what I should say at this moment.

C. I also started asking other pastors, “What are you going to speak on?” I’d meet someone at an event, find out they were a pastor and immediately ask, “What text are you looking at for the sermons in the weeks just before and just after the election; What do you think people are going to need to hear from a pastor at that moment?”

IV. This is the fifth presidential election cycle to happen since I became senior pastor at Christ Church. During the previous four, I did some sort of brief series on politics. These were based on the idea that:

A. Politics matters. At its most basic, politics is the study of how we are going to live together. And God does have ideas about all of that, especially for His followers.

1. There is a sense in which the church is to be a political outpost of the kingdom. We are to be those shaped – not by the elephant or the donkey - but by the lamb.

2. We are to be an earthly assembly of a heavenly reality. A foretaste of the true and eternal kingdom in which Jesus is King.

3. According to Peter in I Peter 2:11 - we are sojourners and exiles who are just passing through. God matters more than Caesar.

a) Our understanding of Him should shape our understanding of politics – not the other way around.

b) The things that are eternal matter more than the things that are temporal.

c) To frame this as Augustine would, the City of God matters more than the City of Man.

4. But the City of Man matters.

a) In Jeremiah 29 we are told to work for the prosperity of the city where God has placed us.

b) Jesus calls us to be City on a Hill. We are not to run and hide and try to protect our own interests, we are to be salt and light in this broken world.

c) We are not to be yet another political interest group – fighting for our own rights. But we are to be a force for the poor and the common good.

5. There is much more to life we are called to than politics, but the term church – *ekklesia* – was a Greek political term when Jesus claimed it for what he would launch.

6. There is a sense in which we are a political outpost for the Kingdom of God and there is another sense in which we are to be involved in a loving and unique way in what goes on around us. .

B. Over the last twenty years, while working hard to avoid any partisan pronouncements, I have shared what I saw as first principles that guide us politically.

1. I spoke out of Romans 13 about the nature and purpose of the State.

2. I talked about our responsibilities to others, the need to seek just laws and the privilege of voting.

3. I gave a sermon asking, Is Jesus a Democrat or a Republican?, explored religious liberty, explored how the church is to impact the state, looked at when Civil Disobedience is called for, reminded you that we are to pray for our leaders, and more.

C. As I have noted, these were not partisan sermons. And best I can tell, the number of people who accused me of being a liberal Democrat and the number who said they always knew I was a right-wing ideologue were roughly the same.

D. To my way of thinking, that makes sense, because as I read the Bible I find a handful of social – cultural – political issues being raised on both sides of our current political divide. As Tim Keller recently framed things:

1. Following both the Bible and the early church, Christians should be committed to racial justice and the poor, but also to the understanding that sex is only for marriage and for nurturing family. One of those views seems liberal and the other looks oppressively conservative. The historical Christian positions on social issues do not fit into contemporary political alignments.

E. The fact is, few groups try to hold onto all four.

F. So, I understand that people whose views are shaped mostly by a political party will occasionally take issue with what I say.

G. And yes, I know I am water skiing over much. The question is not just what side of an issue to be on – such as carrying for the poor. There is a big debate over how to do it – over the right policies:

1. And those on the left think it's best to raise taxes so there are government programs to do this;

2. While those on the right think it's not government's job and that the government is very inefficient.

H. Yes, I get all of that. And I also get that this is a tense, complicated and divisive moment – which means, I am likely to make everyone mad by some of what I say or leave unsaid.

I. However, as your pastor, there are some things I believe I need to say. Four things I want to be sure you do not forget as you vote. Here we go:

V. Do not forget, your primary focus is to be on Jesus. We are to seek First the Kingdom of God.

A. The most important thing you will do on Tuesday does not pivot around who you vote for to be President, but who you honor as King. There is only one person qualified to rule your life – and he is not running on either ticket.

B. As Christ followers, we are not primarily defined - our hope is not fundamentally contingent upon - a political event, an election outcome or a judicial nomination. As Charles Colson said, the Kingdom of God will never arrive via Air Force One.

C. In Isaiah 33:22 we read: **For the LORD is our judge [judicial], the LORD is our lawgiver [legislative], the LORD is our king [executive], it is he who will save us.” In other words, neither the judicial, legislative, nor executive branch of our government is the ultimate source of wisdom, strength or power.**

D. Our hope is never ultimately to be in political power, and the moment you let politics shape you more than Jesus you are in deep trouble. You have created an idol

which will twist and contort you. And you are worshipping something that is powerless to save.

E. Do not be one of those who makes a secondary issue their primary passion. Do not forget, the most important thing about you is not who you vote for as president, but who you honor as King.

VI. Do not forget – number two - we are to be people of hope.

A. In I Corinthians 13, Paul celebrates “faith, hope and love.” Now he goes on to prioritize love. But hope is hanging out with faith and love – and that’s impressive company.

B. So let me remind you of two points I have been making a lot lately. First, this hope is not to be tied to the results of the election. And second, hope is not optimism. It’s not about finding good trends lines in the economic or CDC reports. It is not based on whether your candidate wins or who controls the Senate.

C. As a Christ follower, our hope is not grounded in temporal things, it is anchored in Christ – in His work and His promises. Your mood is to be shaped more by an empty tomb and the glory of Jesus than by the results of an election.

D. Regardless of whether your candidate wins or loses, regardless of whether things get worse or better during your lifetime, you have been promised – by someone who died for you and rose again – that your eternity is secure and will be wonderful. Your disposition should be shaped by this.

E. As Peter writes in 1 Peter 3f: **Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you.**

F. Whatever is announced on Tuesday night (or, as now appears likely, much later than that), the fact of the resurrection should change your Wednesday more than who will occupy the oval office for the next four years.

VII. Number three: Do not forget, you are called to love your neighbor.

A. When Jesus was asked to summarize the commandments, he said: **Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. And love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.**

B. Do not forget that you are to vote for what is best for others – for the common good.

C. I am a fan of the church. There is nothing like it. It is force for good unlike any other – but it is flawed, it has made many big mistakes and one of the things that is painful about this moment – by which I mean, the last forty years – is that Christians have come to be viewed as a political bloc that votes for its own best interest. Instead of being seen as a group that wants the best for the poor and oppressed – the widow and orphan – it is seen as a group that is trying to force its views and morality on others.

D. Now, this is complicated, because:

1. I believe that the morals God has set down are not arbitrary, they reflect the way things work – they reflect the grain of the universe. I believe that we do not break God’s laws so much as we break ourselves against them, consequently, I believe it is only loving to advocate for good laws and good government.

2. And I think our country is making big and costly mistakes that will circle back and bite us
 3. And I do think that one of the very best things that can happen is not just for revival but for reformation. For people to trust Christ and then seek to live righteous lives.
- E. If you buy Malik's view that society is made up of seven institutions - the family, church, state, government, business, education and the arts - then I think it's easy to see that we need the church to thrive if the other groups are to have a chance.
1. We cannot tax a society enough to pay for people to provide the love and care a healthy family will provide for free.
 2. We cannot tax a society enough to pay for enough police to keep the laws – or guarantee that the police would be wise with that power.
 3. If you read our founders, you hear them making these points over and over.
- F. In his new book, *Morality*, Rabbi Jonathan Sacks adds his voice to this discussion. He argues that Western society is built on three piers: democracy, free-market capitalism, and consensual morality. He then argues that the first two cannot sustain us without the third – without morality.
- G. I believe that the church is critical for society to work. I believe in the Golden Triangle: I believe that freedom requires virtue; virtue requires faith and faith requires freedom. **PICTURE**
1. Societal breakdown cannot be fixed with political power and government funding.
- H. I think the church is critical for Western society to last.
- I. I think that if we will only look, it is increasingly clear that we are a cut flower culture – one that has managed to look good and keep working, even though it is no longer grounded in soil that made it beautiful.
- J. I am a fan of the church. But, in the last forty years, our reputation is that we vote for what is best for us.
- K. Do not forget, as a Christian, you are called to think about what is best for others.
- L. While I am here, let me note that we are not just called to love our neighbor, we are called to love our enemies. (Let me pause to note, enemies is not the term I would choose here to describe those who will vote differently. Rival seems better. But I am going with enemies because Jesus didn't say "love your rivals.")
- M. So, do not forget, as a Christian, you are called to think about what is best for others. And while I am here, let me note that we are not just called to love our neighbor, we are called to love our enemies.
1. I am not suggesting that you should turn your enemy into your friend by persuading them to think – perhaps I should say "to vote" - like you. I will assume you are trying to do that. I am saying, Jesus calls us to be the kind of people who treat their enemies as if they were their friends.
 2. A few weeks ago I attempted to make this point in The Friday Update. I wrote:

a) Stop Demonizing | Start Praying: The left and right are not simply disagreeing, they are vilifying. Don't go there. We are called to love our enemies, and I am pretty sure that includes not ascribing evil intentions to their political positions. We must hold their humanity in mind as we extend to them the same grace we want and require.

3. Among other things, this means we must be humble and civil. There is way too much demonizing going on.

VIII. Number Four: Do not forget, we are called to unity. I am speaking about the church.

A. Do not forget, we – those who love Christ - are not only commanded to focus on King over President, and to be people of hope, and to love and serve our neighbor - and to love our enemies! – we are called to love and get along with each other.

B. We are expected – indeed, we are commanded – to get along with each other. That means, you are expected to remain in a relationship with the clueless idiot sitting next to you at church. The person voting for the other candidate.

C. As I noted earlier, in the sermon called “Is Jesus a Democrat or a Republican?” I said we can agree on the outcome we want (such as caring for the poor) but disagree on the way to go about this.

D. On top of that, when we read the New Testament we see Jesus highlighting a number of issues, so we might disagree on how to prioritize matters.

E. My point is, there are a number of ways to be out of sorts with other Christ followers. So, we can expect to not line up with people in our small group. If they are driving you crazy be sure to thank them for helping you work on being a patient and loving person!

F. Remember, your identity should be centered in Jesus, not in politics. The things that unite us should override those things that divide us.

G. As I have said over and over – there are easier ways to do church than what we are attempting.

1. If you read the church growth handbooks, they say: Pick an age group and focus on them – we have said, “we want to be a multi-generational church.

2. If you read the church growth handbooks, they say: pick an ethnic group and focus there. Follow the homogeneity principle. We say, that is not what we see in the book of Acts, that is now what we are called to in the pastoral epistles, that is not a description of heaven.

3. If you read the church growth handbooks, they say: pick a socio-economic slice. We say, not a chance.

4. If you read the church growth handbooks, they say, focus on families or singles. Not both. We say, “No.”

H. And to the point at hand, if you read the church growth handbooks, they say: you can either be a red church or a blue church, but not a purple church.

1. And I say, who wants to be at a red church or a blue church?

2. But more to the point, that's not what we are called to. If Jesus had a tax collector – who had sold out the Jews to cooperate with the Romans - and a zealot – who wanted to overthrow the Romans – if he had those two in the same small group, we are clearly to pull people together from across deep political divides.

I. Men and women, there are all kinds of things we can divide over:

1. Public school, home school or Christian school.
 2. Worship styles.
 3. Cubs / White Sox
- J. It's not hard to find ways to not get along. But we are called to unity.
- K. Indeed, our unity matters to Christ, just read his prayer in John 17.
- L. We are to be reconciled through Christ to all things and this means, to our brothers and sisters in Christ.
- M. In one of his recent Tweets, Tim Keller noted that the outside world should look at the church and marvel that people who do not agree on many things – and who are not alike – share such a deep unity and bond.

IX. There is more, but you'll have to come back next week for the second half – where I talk about what I think you should be focusing on next. Let me pause here for a moment to say a few things:

- A. If you are going to write me to say I'm an idiot, send it to your campus pastor – I suspect most of them will agree with you!
- B. If you are going to write to say, "I missed point number three," please hear, it's all online. Every week we post the audio, the video and the manuscript of the sermon – and the manuscript often has additional points and footnotes. You are invited to frantically take notes, but a written transcript of the sermon is online.
- C. If you do not know about the Friday newsletter, send me an email or go to Mikewoodruff.org.
1. For several years I have sent out a weekly newsletter in which I comment on culture and books and the like. It's called The Friday Updates
 2. Since COVID hit I have been doing a six minute daily devotions
 3. For the last few months I have been hosting a History Podcast called One Hundred Plus – that looks at the 100 more significant people, events and ideas impacting the church over the last 2000 years.
 4. There are other resources as well – such as last week's podcast in which I interviewed two pastors about ????
- D. There is more I want to say. And if you come back next week for the post-election message you will hear the one big thing I think you need to drill down on whatever has happened.
- E. So:
1. please vote – it is a privilege and a responsibility
 2. Please show up next week
 3. And please pray for the winner – whoever that is.
- F. And please:
1. Do not forget: our primary focus is to be on Jesus
 2. Do not forget: we are to be people of hope.
 3. Do not forget, we are called to love: our neighbor and our enemy.
 4. And do not forget: we are called to unity.