

## Christians and Elections

**St. Mark Lutheran  
All Saints Day-three services**

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*Now when he saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them, saying: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. Blessed are the poor in heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you for my sake. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. Matthew 5:1-12*

Grace and peace to you on this day from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

It is two days until the election. I am sorry to say there has been a lot of fighting and name calling. There are many people unhappy about the main choices for president. There are people who are afraid of where our country is headed. In some cases, families have been in conflict and friendships have been strained.

Christianity's relationship with a secular society has always been complicated. Many sense that we are drifting away from basic laws and practices on which our country has been based. This has brought an increase in tension. It has raised many questions in the minds of Christians about their role in politics, elections, and the public arena.

I thought we might take a look at this today on the basis of some writings in the Holy Scriptures and also our Lutheran Confessions. Some time ago I became aware of Martin Luther's worldview of the situation that we are in. Luther taught that God rules the world through two realms-an earthly realm, which he called the Kingdom of the Left, and a spiritual realm, which he called the Kingdom of the Right. Keep in mind that these are not meant as political terms as we use them today. They are meant as identification of two different kingdoms, much the same as if I referred to using my left hand or said I was using my right hand.

In such a viewpoint, the Kingdom of the Left refers to earthly governments in which God uses His Law to curb evildoers. This has a basis in the Holy Scriptures in Romans 13 along with other places. The problem is, secular rulers are used in the Kingdom of the Left. They may or may not be believers. They may or may not be fair or good rulers. But the government has a right to try to maintain peace, law and order, and reasonable regulations. When it is doing that we are expected to be obedient. But keep in mind what Jesus once said about kingdoms. He said, "My kingdom is not of this world." (John 18:36)

In such a viewpoint, the Kingdom of the Right is the Christian Church, in which God uses His Gospel to forgive sins and bring people to God through faith in Jesus Christ. God wishes to use us to bring the Kingdom of God to people.

There is, and there will probably always be, a tension here. For sometimes kings, or governors, or presidents, or whatever kind of rulers are in power, make laws or decrees or push agendas which are clearly in conflict with God's holy laws. We need to be aware there are several areas where that is the case today. 1) There is a conflict between abortion and God's Law of "Thou shalt not kill." 2) The more extreme advocates of same sex-marriage and related sexual practices want churches and pastors penalized if we are not willing to tolerate this in our churches. They currently have three bills before Congress to advance their cause. If they get their way, it could lead to the government attempting to censor what we are preaching and teaching, which is based on passages in both the Old and New Testaments. It could even cause us to lose our tax-exempt status and possibly cripple our ministry. 3) Some of our ministers and chaplains have been advised not to use the name of Jesus in certain situation or they could face consequences. "What is happening to our freedom of speech and freedom of religion?" some people ask. This is a legitimate concern for Christians.

What is a Christian to do in such circumstances?

Let me start with what Christians should not do. We believe people should not bring politics and campaigns for individuals into an organized church. These things divide people. I know that some churches do, but actually they are breaking the law for religious, non profit organizations. I thank God that our Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod is against doing this. As I said, these things divide people, and unity in a church body is very important. This is not the purpose of the church. We must not be distracted or divided as we go about our vital mission of calling people to repentance and sharing the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Now, are candidates, politics, and elections important? Yes, they are. And decisions made in the Kingdom of the Left, either good or bad, can affect our lives and ministry as a Christian church. So we would be wise to be involved. We should be informed and we should join with people of like mind in the public arena to try to promote Godly principles in politics and government.

Should we vote, even if we don't like the particular candidates? Yes, we should. We have a dual citizenship. Christians are members of the Kingdom of the Left and the Kingdom of the Right. It is a privilege for us to be allowed to elect our leaders. Much of the world does not have that privilege. We have a responsibility to elect those leaders whom we believe might serve us best. If we want to skip a particular race or office, we have the freedom to do so. But how can we bring about positive change and influence elected officials and help decide important issues if we do not vote? Jesus, who died to pay the debt for our sins, calls for his people to be salt and light to a dying world. (Matthew 5:13-14) It's hard to do that without carrying out our responsibilities in the Kingdom of the Left. The Bible tells us we have had plenty of Biblical figures who helped change the political environment of their day: Joseph, Moses, Deborah, Samuel, David, Nehemiah, Esther, Daniel, and others.

We, as Christians, are called to be good Americans, to follow and obey our government as long as what we are asked to do does not violate the laws and commandments of God. But if the governments laws and commandments do violate what God has taught us, we need to take a stand. When Peter and the other apostles were commanded by the officials not to teach in Jesus' name, they replied, "We must obey God rather than men." (Acts 5:29) We may be punished or persecuted when we do this. Jesus addressed that in our Gospel reading for the day when he said, "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you." I understand that probably none of us want to walk that road. I don't want to walk that road. But the followers of Jesus sometimes have to walk it, and he will give us the strength and make it up to us in the end.

Today we observe All Saints Day. We remember those who have gone before us, and how they served the Lord on this earth and the impact they had during their time on earth. This is our time. We should never forget that we are Christians first and Americans second. While we can and should work for positive change, these changes usually offer only band-aid solutions to the real problems of this world, which are spiritual in nature. It will take Jesus to set everything straight, and when he comes again he has promised to do just that.

In the meantime, let's do what saints are called to do. Let's pray for the election and let us pray (1 Timothy 2:1-2) for whoever our leaders are after the election, because that is what the Holy Scriptures tell us to do. Let us stand up for what is right, but let us be merciful, as God has been merciful to us. Let us be slow to anger and realize that our actions often speak louder than our words. Let us be the peacemakers, but not at the cost of compromising God's Word. And let us remember our Lord's promise, that whether it is sooner or later, we will be blessed.

Jesus, lead us on. Amen.

