

PASTOR'S NOTES, October 2020

“Do not put your trust in princes, in mortals, in whom there is no help.”

- Psalm 146:3 (NRSV)

You will hear people say, “This is the most important election in our lifetime.” I know, because I’ve heard at least one person say it every four years since 1968 (when I started paying attention). So it would appear that the complete sentence should read: “This is the most important election in our lifetime, until the next one.”

It is certainly true that some elections have had a larger impact on human history than others. The most notable of these is probably the series of elections in Germany from 1928 to 1932, where the Nazi party grew to 40% of the government (more than any other party), and in 1933 the party leader, Adolph Hitler, was appointed as Chancellor. But even though there were surely many who saw warning signs, they had neither the votes nor the political power to stop it, and did not have one clear alternative. Even in hindsight, it is hard to see how it could have happened differently.

We can count it a blessing that we live in a country where we have a say, whether in local decisions or in national ones. Most of our Christian sisters and brothers have not lived in that environment throughout history, and worldwide most of them do not now. There were no elections in the world of the New Testament. The early Christians not only did not have a say when local and world leaders came on the scene, they experienced leaders who were openly hostile to believers in God. And yet early Church leaders wrote:

“For the Lord’s sake accept the authority of every human institution, whether of the emperor as supreme, or of governors, as sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to praise those who do right. For it is God’s will that by doing right you should silence the ignorance of the foolish. As servants of God, live as free people; yet do not use your freedom as a pretext for evil. Honor everyone. Love the family of believers. Fear God. Honor the emperor.”

- 1 Peter 2:13-17 (NRSV);
(See also Romans 13:1-8)

Regardless of how any given election plays out (or for that matter, any overthrow of a government anywhere or anytime), our task as Christians remains the same: to be sharing the love of Christ in our words and deeds to any sisters and brothers along our path. This is not only the ordinary persons in our daily lives. This also includes those who have taken political offices, who find that people seem to forget that they are still human beings. And this also includes the people “on the other side” (as if there really are two sides, or any side) who are so caught up in the election fervor that we assume them to be mentally ill.

There is a kind of insanity that is built into our country’s election process. Typically there are two candidates with a realistic shot at winning the election. There are persons who are totally sold on their candidate, perhaps they have been with them from their earliest beginnings. But more people have come to candidates because they have developed “winning” chances and they

seem better than the alternatives. We have concerns and opinions across many different issues but we have compressed all of these into a single action, a vote that we believe will inject something positive in our world, at least if enough people have compressed all their issues in the same way as us. We believe this even though our “compression” of issues includes ideas that are shaky at best, like the idea that a candidate will or won’t do something after elected (we can’t know that), or the idea we can know people by how we group them (political party, race, gender, age, education, etc.). So it would appear that we should approach our “one action” and that of others with a bit more humility.

We do well to ask ourselves how we will minister to each other after this election passes. We can anticipate now that we will still find ourselves a divided community and a divided country, and many will bemoan this and say “someone needs to do something.” For many the complaint will be as far as they ever get (many won’t even vote). For many, they will see their duty as telling others they need to do something about the mess, and then leave it at that (sounds like a few preachers I know, but then in this respect, many of us are preachers). So it falls to me and a few others to decide what I (or we) will do person-to-person to share Christ across those divides.

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be the name "Kam". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a horizontal line at the end.