

Epworth Chapel on the Green
September 9, 2012
Pentecost 15
Rev. Dr. Brook Thelander

Isaiah 35:1-7
Psalm 146
James 1:17-27
Mark 7:31-37

In two months, our nation will go to the polls to elect a President, as well as key state and local leaders. As that time approaches, we are bombarded with increasingly bombastic messages in the television and print and social networking media. Representatives from both parties, each attacking the other, are posturing to try to win their coveted office.

Tuesday marks the eleventh anniversary of the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. As that day draws near, no doubt those events will also be politicized by both sides. The same stock set of questions are pulled from the proverbial files, and they are hauled out before us. Questions like:

Are we any safer now than we were at the time of the attacks?

Can you trust the Republicans to keep America safe and secure? Can you trust the Democrats to do so?

Are you better off today than you were four years ago?

The list of questions goes on and on.

I'm not here this morning to tell you how to vote or to dictate to you what your political preferences should be. *I am here to tell you that it is incumbent upon all of us to read and understand Scripture, to study the life and teachings of Jesus, and to work out with fear and trembling how that relates to the decisions you make when you walk into the voting booth.* And as you do, I also recommend that you listen closely to the writer of Psalm 146, the Psalm for today.

The Psalmist is addressing in his day a problem that had no time limitations or expiration on it. It is, in my view, the very same problem that is reflected in our current political conversations in America. *The problem the Psalmist speaks of is the tendency of us human beings to place inordinate trust in our human leaders or rulers to solve our problems and provide our needs.*

In response to that tendency, the Psalm writer simply says: “Don’t do it.” Do not put your trust in rulers, nor in any child of earth.” The term “rulers” here in other translations is the term “princes,” but the underlying sense behind the term is that of *clout* or *influence*. We might translate the Psalmist’s words as: “Do not put your trust in the powerful, the influential, in those whose backing might appear to be the most sound.”

The Psalmist’s reasons become evident as you read the Psalm. To place inordinate trust in human leaders ultimately doesn’t work because those leaders are

all too human, and where they might have the *will* to keep their promises, they often lack the *power* to do so.

We see this happen frequently in politics, whether at the local, state, or national level. Persons are elected to office with aspirations of public service and change, but that idealism soon crashes hard against the rocks of political compromise and partisanship.

God, on the other hand, can be trusted to keep his promises because he is not only the Creator, he is the Covenant-Maker and Covenant-Keeper. His ability to provide justice and freedom is not thwarted by gridlock. His hands are not tied by partisan special interests. His agenda is not controlled by PAC money. His agenda is love, redemption, and freedom.

This is why the Psalmist says in verse 1: “I will praise the LORD as long as I live!” When he says, “I will praise the LORD,” this is more than a statement of fact. The power of his words, and the intention of his words, is lost a little in translation. What the Psalmist is saying is, “I *intend* to praise the LORD, I *mean* to praise the LORD, I am strongly *resolved* to praise the LORD.”

In other words, God alone -- not human leaders -- is the foundation of the Psalmist’s life, and the source of his hope.

Here at Epworth, we do not as a church make political endorsements or espouse any one political party or ideology. But the fact that we do not do so does

not mean that politics and the Gospel are unrelated, or that the Gospel and politics are two separate domains that never interrelate. The fact that we do not take an official position as a church does not mean that the Gospel and politics are mutually exclusive. They are not.

But neither are they *synonymous*. God is neither a Republican nor a Democrat, He is neither Liberal nor Conservative. And when a minister, a church, or a portion of the Church tries to remake God in some political image and then use that as a litmus test for authentic Christianity, the Holy Spirit is not far behind, calling us to repent.

Many years ago, a prominent leader said these words: "We don't have men fit for these times. We lack education, experience in the world, money, everything. I feel an unutterable anxiety. God grant us wisdom and strength in the coming months."

These words were written by John Adams to the first Continental Congress of the United States. They could read, however, as though they came from yesterday's *New York Times* or *Idaho Statesman*.

But Adam Graham's admonition to us a few weeks ago remains true. We may feel we lack human leadership adequate for the times. But in the midst of our anxiety, let us remember that we serve a God who is *more* than adequate for the times.

Today, as we worship together, we find ourselves personally and as a nation at a point of reflection and deep introspection. As we come to the Table of the Lord, I offer you this simple challenge: *Pray for your leaders. Participate in the political process. [But] pin your hopes on God alone.*

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.