

More recently we've had elections too-close-to-call for weeks, elections decided by the Supreme Court, and more candidates running for office than we can shake sticks at: it seems American politics is always a bit of a circus.

- Comedian George Carlin quipped, "In America, anyone can be president. That's the problem."
- Mark Twain commented: "If voting made any difference, they wouldn't let us do it."
- Observing American politics, Soviet dictator Josef Stalin observed "The people who cast the votes decide nothing. The people who count the votes decide everything."
- Columnist Bill Vaughan sarcastically wrote: "A citizen of America will cross the ocean to fight for democracy, but won't cross the street to vote in a national election."

So, why do we bother with elections and why do we care? We bother and we care because it is our right as Americans to elect our President, our Legislators, our Governor, our Mayor, our City Council and our School Board. That is a sacred right and a privilege that most of the world does not have.

- So, with respect to Mr. Carlin: the idea that anyone can be president is one of the things that makes our nation great.
- With great deference to Mr. Twain: they don't "let" us vote, we vote because it is our right, and we should take that right seriously. So I urge you to be informed when you cast your vote on Tuesday.
- In total disagreement with Mr. Stalin: our votes do matter! When we vote, we make our voices heard and our preferences known.
- And with a challenge to Mr. Vaughan: not crossing the street to vote is the choice each citizen is free to make because of the men and women who crossed the oceans to fight for our right to vote.

We are a nation unparalleled in the history of the world for empowering its citizens to be actively engaged in governing itself. Our nation still stands as the last and greatest hope for peace and democracy in the world. Americans are a people unmatched in their generosity, and we are a people unequaled in our faith in God's providence. We are not a perfect people, but as we learned in our study of the covenants, God chooses and uses faithful people, not perfect people. So I urge you to exercise your right to vote on Election Day! Choose wisely! And may God continue to bless and guide us, our nation and its leaders.

From 2 Chronicles we hear God's words: *if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, pray, seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land* (7:14). There is a lot promised in this passage. If we, who are called out by God to be a light to the nations, will humble ourselves – that is, if we will put God and God's kingdom first – and if we will pray and seek God's will and ways, then God promises to hear our prayers, to forgive our sins, and to heal our land. That may be just about the best campaign promise I've ever heard! What's more, this promise is made by the God we know to be ever faithful to the promises God makes. So we would be wise to choose to follow the God whose track record is proven and reliable. We would be wise to choose God who is the only One who can make America great again, the only One in Whom we are truly stronger together. So ask God's wisdom, that you might choose wisely this Election Day.

In Acts 1, the apostles sought God's wisdom as they gathered to choose a successor for Judas who had died. The apostles cast lots, a fairly common practice for making decisions in that day, the "lots" being anything close at hand: short sticks, flat stones, coins, small tiles (like dominoes), or even dice. The lots were put into a bowl or jar, shaken and cast out on the ground or a table. The outcome was determined by how the lots fell. Although it seems quite random to us, the apostles believed this method would reveal the will of God. The election for Judas' successor came down to two candidates: Joseph called Barsabbas (also known as Justus) and Matthias, men who had accompanied Jesus during his ministry and who had seen Jesus after his resurrection. The apostles cast the lots, *and the lot fell on Matthias and he was added to the eleven apostles* (v. 26).

Now, I submit that casting lots might not be the worst way to choose a candidate. I'm not suggesting that you throw dice at the ballot box, but I do hope you will consult God and consider what's best for the larger community when you cast your vote on Tuesday. For regardless of who is elected on November 8<sup>th</sup>, we are a people chosen by God, elected first for salvation in Christ, and elected also for service to God and to neighbors. No matter the choices we make at the polling place, we always choose wisely when we partner with God in all that God is doing to make the world right again.

In the third Indiana Jones movie, *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*, Harrison Ford and Sean Connery search for the Holy Grail, the cup that Christ used at the Last Supper, which provides immortality. The pair is racing to find the grail before the Nazis can get their hands on it. They find the grail in a cave, where a medieval knight decked out in chain mail, stands guard over the grail, as he has faithfully done for two thousand years. Surrounding the knight are dozens of cups: metal cups, ceramic cups, big cups, small cups, ornate cups and plain cups.

The knight cautions the grail hunters to “choose wisely” for although the true grail brings life, a false grail will lead to death. The Nazi treasure hunter chooses an ornate gold cup encrusted with jewels, saying it is a cup “worthy of a king.” But it is a false grail: he drinks from the cup and dies. The knight wryly observes: “He chose poorly.” Then Indiana Jones chooses a small, earthenware cup: a rough-hewn cup made by a carpenter. He closes his eyes, says a quick prayer, drinks from the cup and lives. The knight tells him: “You have chosen wisely.”

The choices we make really do matter, so choose wisely. When we seek God’s counsel and follow God’s ways, there is no buyer’s remorse. When we choose God’s ways, we set ourselves on the path to life. When align ourselves with God’s will because we seek the greater good, the greater welfare, and the greater way. For God has chosen us to be the elect of God’s Kingdom: elected for salvation in Jesus Christ with the forgiveness of sins and the promise of life eternal, but also elected for service to the world in the name of Jesus Christ. We stand in a long tradition of those elected before us, and on this All Saints’ Sunday we remember thirteen of our members and many other loved ones whom God elected and called to serve. They chose the ways of God over the ways of the world. They chose to live and love and serve as servants of God and neighbors. They chose wisely. We gather at the communion table to make our voice heard and our preference known: we choose God!

This presidential election may be among the most contentious and unsettling in modern history; but no matter the outcome, our status as the elect of God, chosen to love and to serve, endures. As God’s elect, the Church will continue: to speak truth to power; to seek the welfare of the city; to see injustice and call it out; to share the hope of God’s promised Kingdom; to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, give water to those who thirst, speak for those who have no voice, and visit those in prison; and to sing God’s praises forevermore.

Prayer: Lord God, as the election approaches, we seek to better understand the issues and concerns that confront our city, state, and nation; and how the Gospel compels us to respond as faithful citizens in our community. We ask for eyes that are free from blindness so that we might see each other as brothers and sisters, one and equal in dignity, especially those who are victims of abuse and violence, deceit and poverty. We ask for ears that will hear the cries of children who are hungry and abandoned; and men and women oppressed because of race or creed, religion or gender. We ask for minds and hearts that are open to hearing the voice of leaders who will bring us closer to your Kingdom. We pray for discernment so that we may choose leaders who hear your Word, live your love, and keep in the ways of your truth as they follow in the steps of Jesus and guide us to your Kingdom of justice and peace. We ask this in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ, and through the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen

# Choose Wisely

**Sunday, November 6, 2016**

**The Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN**

**2 Chronicles 7:14**

**Acts 1:12-17, 21-26**

Tuesday is Election Day. I, for one, will be glad when this election cycle is behind us. I’m not saying I’m particularly pleased with any of our choices for president; I just want the nastiness of the election process to go away. But as nasty as the run-up to this election has been, it’s not the weirdest or most unusual election in American history.

- In 1788, before political parties formed, George Washington ran for the presidency unopposed. He is the only candidate to garner 100% of the Electoral College vote.
- The real question in 1788 was who would become vice president. At the time, the runner up in the Electoral College vote automatically became the Vice President. Eleven candidates made a play for the office, but John Adams came out on top.
- Electoral politics hit a snag in 1800 when Thomas Jefferson and his vice-presidential pick, Aaron Burr, tied with 73 electoral votes each. The House of Representatives deliberated for seven days before choosing Jefferson to be President. The drama triggered passage of the 12<sup>th</sup> amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which stipulates that the Electoral College picks the president and vice-president separately, doing away with the runner-up complications.
- Things got downright nasty in 1828 when candidates Andrew Jackson and John Quincy Adams started hurling insults: Jackson accused Adams of human trafficking, and Adams called Jackson's wife, Rachel, a "convicted adulteress," because she married Jackson before finalizing her divorce to a previous husband. Jackson won the election.
- In 1872, incumbent Ulysses S. Grant had an easy run for a second term because his opponent, Horace Greeley, died before the final votes were cast. Grant won an impressive 286 electoral votes, but maybe more impressive is the 66 electoral votes Greeley won! Greeley remains the only presidential candidate to die before the election was finalized.