

“Choosing a Leader”

Joshua 24:14-15

Sunday, November 8, 2020

Pastor Charlie Berthoud

On Tuesday, we here in the USA had what many people are saying is the most important election in their lifetime.

I’m recording this sermon on Wednesday, and the results aren’t fully known right now, but this sermon isn’t dependent on who wins and who loses the White House.

Regardless of the results, at this important time in the life of our country, it’s good to reaffirm some basic truths—as citizens and Christians.

We can reaffirm that our Constitution begins with the words “We the people...” not “We the red states” or “We the blue states.” It goes on to encourage us

“to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, ensure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity....”

We can reaffirm the crucial importance of voting and ensuring free and fair and accurately counted elections. We remember that it wasn’t too long ago that women were not allowed to vote and that voter suppression of Black people has a long and ugly history in our country. John Lewis reminds us:

I say from time to time that the vote is precious. It's almost sacred. It is the most powerful nonviolent tool or instrument that we have in a democratic society. And we must use it.

--John Lewis

We need to remember the encouragement to rise above selfishness and animosity with the words of Abraham Lincoln. In his first inaugural address at the beginning of the Civil War, he wrote:

“We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies.... The mystic chords of memory will swell when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature.”

--Abraham Lincoln, First Inaugural Address, 1861

When election results are clear, some of us will be overwhelmed with disappointment, and others will be inspired with hope. Regardless of the results, together we have work to do, as a country, as neighbors, as citizens:

- for a more perfect union,
- for an ever-stronger system of voting,
- and to always be seeking the better angels of our nature.

And that striving, that work we do, including political work, is part of our Christian faith.

Being a Christian isn't simply about hoping that God will save us a seat in heaven. Being a Christian means living as a follower of Jesus right now—doing what Jesus did and taught: loving our neighbors, working to make this world a better place.

So, at this important time in our national life when we are choosing new political leaders, we need to remember whom we have chosen as our leader.

At baptism, confirmation, and the reception of new members, we affirm that Jesus is our Lord and Savior. That's our way of choosing our leader.

We reaffirm that choice in the Ten Commandments, which we share here at Covenant every month, on the first Sunday, as part of our worship service.

The first two commandments echo each other:

- You must have no other gods before me.
- Do not make an idol for yourself—no form whatsoever.

(Exodus 20:3-4, Common English Bible)

God makes it abundantly clear that we need to have our priorities straight, and that we are called to choose God first and foremost.

We see this reflected in the book of Joshua.

The people have settled the promised land after the long journey through the wilderness. It's a new chapter in their life, so Joshua calls them together at Shechem for a renewal commitment. He could have rallied them to make him the undisputed leader, the one to be worshiped and adored. But he invites them to make a different choice. Listen for God's word from Joshua 24:14-15:

"Now therefore revere the Lord, and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness; put away the gods that your ancestors served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. ¹⁵ Now if you are unwilling to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served in the region beyond the River or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord."

Choose this day whom you will serve!

Those of us who voted made choices for our political leaders. But we need to keep choosing.

It seems to me that, regardless of our politics, our race, our age, our gender, our whatever... for those of us who claim the name Christian, we need to make a daily commitment to serving God, known in the person of Jesus, the one we have affirmed as Lord and Savior.

Each morning is a chance for us to "choose this day whom we will serve."

Maybe that's as simple as starting the day saying something like:

Guide me and lead me God

Show me the way O Lord

Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done

I choose to listen to God and follow God's ways

The daily choice is all about love—love of God and neighbor.

As I've said before, the Christian life is about learning to love the right things in the right way. So if we're on the right track, we choose God before our favorite politicians, or our bank accounts, or cars, or clothes, or sports teams, or careers.



Here at Covenant, we focus on choosing God's love.

We try to learn it, to welcome it, to experience it, and then we try to live it, to put it in practice.

That's hard to do in our diverse and divided culture.

This past week was Halloween, and in between the few trick or treaters who came to our house, I was poking around on the internet, trying to find out what the favorite candies are in the USA.

My wife had said she likes Almond Joys, with the coconut—but I don't, so I wanted to find statistics to prove me right and justify my dislike of Almond Joy.

I found one survey where Almond Joy was ranked 23rd most popular Halloween candy in the USA, between 3 Musketeers and Life Savers. So, I felt somewhat justified.

I noticed Skittles, Reeses Peanut Butter Cups, and M&M's were 1-2-3 on the [list](#).

That led me to another survey, asking peoples' opinions on best-selling candy. I was surprised to see that in this particular survey of people in the USA, 2% of the respondents didn't know what M&M's are.

My first response was, *what kind of person doesn't know the joy of M&M's?!* But as I thought about our great country, I realized the wonderful and rich diversity that we have and how we welcome people from a variety of countries and cultures. So, it's quite feasible that some absolutely wonderful citizens of our country have no idea what M&Ms are, just as I am unfamiliar with plenty of foods.

More importantly than candy, we need to recognize that people have a wide variety of life experiences and see things differently.

We have to find ways to work together for the common good, no matter who is in the White House, the House of Representatives, or the house next door.

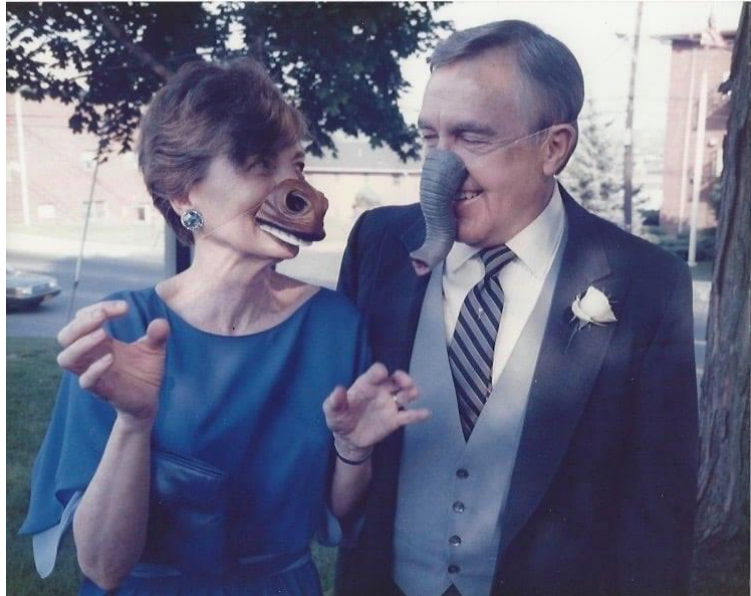
In our weekly email CONNECTIONS, I wrote about my childhood friend Chuck who recently shared a delightful photo of his parents on social media.

I spent a lot of time at Chuck's house and remember his parents as kind and gracious people.

He wrote: "This is one of my favorite photos of my parents.

Mom was a liberal Democrat and proud feminist. Dad was a Chamber of Commerce Republican. They taught us that it's ok to disagree, just as long as you're not disagreeable."

What a great message for our divided country. What a great challenge for us as we seek to love our neighbors.



Love your neighbor. No exceptions.

Black, White, Asian, Hispanic, Multi-Racial
Republican, Democrat, Independent
Queer, Straight, Trans, Non-binary
Jew, Muslim, Atheist, Christian
Immigrant, Homeless, Old, Young, Rich, Poor



In this challenging time, we need to be intentional about our love.

Specifically, this means we serve God and follow Jesus by doing exactly what the sign in front of our church says: Love your neighbor—no exceptions.

To help put this idea into practice, I invite you to think about someone right now who votes differently than you, or

likes some other type of candy, or cheers for the “wrong” sports team, or likes “weird” music.... Think about that person right now. Pray for them. Ask God to show you how to be a good neighbor, how to reflect God’s love for them.

And pray for yourself too. The election is over, but our country is still hurting. We need to remain healthy and strong in God’s love, and we need to keep choosing to follow God’s ways, so we can make this world a better place. Let us pray.

Loving God, open our ears so we can really hear you, and give us strength and wisdom to make good choices. Renew us in your love, and help us to share your love with everyone. Amen.