

Sermon Text for November 6, 2016

By Rev. Robert K. Bronkema

I Samuel 16:6-13, Acts 1:21-26

Why do we vote?

Well I know that you hoped for a refuge from the craziness, especially as we find ourselves in the heart of a state which just might be the one who chooses the next President. That's not a foreign place for me to be in. Who here remembers the election of 2000? Which state decided the election, literally, in 2000? Florida, and guess who was a pastor in a Southern Presbyterian Church in north Florida at that time with a 4 month old baby named Bethany? That's right, your pastor.

I was messaged this week by a member of that church who said Pastor Bob, I remember a sermon you preached in November of 2000 when the country hadn't decided yet a President, after the election, and you spoke with pride about how unique we are as people that we are able to pass the reign of power peacefully from one person and one party to the next leader. How even in the midst of an election process in 2000 that seemed rigged to the supporters of Al Gore, the transition of power we knew would come about peacefully. I was happy someone remembered a sermon I preached 16 years ago.

But today, we find ourselves on a Sunday before the week of both veteran's day and election day and we recognize we live in an incredibly unique setting as Americans. And I say that not to build up pride, but to make sure you don't take for granted the peaceful and in most cases civil transition that has taken place in this country even since the civil war.

And the reason why I say unique is not only because all across this world the norm is not a peaceful transition to power, but one of violence, but also because in our Scripture the norm would have been a violent transition to power. That we can vote, a new person elected and we can carry on with our lives as normal, I am afraid is a miracle that is lost on many of us.

But what does the Bible say about voting? Is democracy where we choose our leaders, a Christian value, is it something that we can point to in Scripture and say God ordained voting, or God has chosen our form of government as the norm for those who would call themselves Christian?

So what I want all of us to do this Sunday is to sit back and get comfortable, and in the words of Aaron Rodgers, just relax. Let's all just relax as we look to Scripture, the foundation of our information. This is where we get our information, not CNN or Fox News or the internet.

Let's look at Scripture and try to understand why we need to vote, and who knows, you just might be inspired by the Holy Spirit to figure out for whom you should vote. Let's read.

I got a call from Leo in the middle of the week as he was preparing the media for today and he said Bob, do you realize that you chose the same Scripture as last week? Yes, I did, but sometimes I might not have realized it. You see, last week we started our Roman series of which we will take a break for the election, but we looked at how God called David and called us to be set apart by God. We have to be different.

I got a bunch of phone calls this week. In the middle of the week I got a call from New York and it was a guy named DeLafayette Awkward and he is a pastor in Brooklyn. We went to Princeton together and we had some epic battles on the basketball court. He is 6-7 and we used to throw each other around under the basket. I hadn't seen or talked to him in 22 years and he said Bob, I just listened to your sermon from last week, and I disagree with what you said. We are set apart to do God's work in the world. We are not set apart just to be set apart to do nothing. I assured him we were seeing eye to eye on the matter.

We have the same Scripture because David is chosen in this Scripture to be the next king of Israel. Upon what basis is David chosen? Look at vs.7 where we read that we choose people based upon how they look, God chooses them based upon their hearts. We don't do much digging. Whatever our news outlets tells us we are going to believe no matter how crazy the story. We choose and live in the superficial and based upon what other people tell us. God chooses based upon the heart of a person. David is chosen and anointed king based upon his heart. But before you begin to pine and wish for a David, have you forgotten that he committed adultery with Bathsheeba, had her husband killed on the frontline. People, what have I always told you? The more things change, the more they stay the same.

But even though David is anointed and chosen by God, he still has to wait. Saul is still in power. David still has to kill Goliath, he still has to play the harp in King Saul's court. His inauguration takes place on a battlefield and not on the steps of a capital building. They didn't have to count the ballots in Babylon in order for David to take over.

The people of Israel did not choose their king, God does. The same is true in Judges. The people do not ever vote for their leader and their ruler, God chooses the person. And God chooses that person based upon what? Look at vs. 7, based upon their heart. This is the common thread that we find in the NT as well. Turn now to Acts 1 which is not from last week.

We find a leader being chosen. But what we read in the first verses of our Scripture is that the 12th disciple had to be qualified. You couldn't just say you wanted to be a leader, you

had to be qualified. What were the qualifications? First of all, the person has to be one of the core group of disciples who had followed Jesus from the time he was baptized to the time he ascended into heaven. It could not be just a random person who felt called, but had to be qualified.

The second qualification was that they had to be a witness to the resurrection. Not all of the followers of Jesus were able to see him after he was raised from the dead. This person has to be willing to be a witness, a spokesperson for the resurrection of Jesus. Two qualifications for this leader, you must have been his follower and you have to be a witness, a testimony to his resurrection.

So once they decide that these people are qualified, the disciples then pray. This is where we see the binding together of our OT and NT Scriptures. When they pray in vs.24 they appeal to the fact that Jesus knows everyone's what? Heart. They don't ask about the policies of the two candidates: do you prefer contemporary or traditional worship, are you more inward looking to the members of the church or outward looking into the community. They ask simply, Lord God, judge the heart of these two people before us.

Just like us they prayed before choosing one of the two candidates. After their prayer, they then each went into their separate voting booths and voted. No, they chose lots. This is so important. They chose an action of choosing lots which completely eliminated their role in the process and elevated the role of the Providence of God.

The casting of lots as described in Proverbs 18:18 was for the purpose of: Casting lots puts an end to disputes and decides between powerful contenders." The purpose of casting lots in the Bible is to take the decision out of our hands and place it firmly in the hands of God. To this day some churches choose their pastor by this practice. Not Presbyterians, we vote. We have always voted. In fact, the way and the reason why this country votes has much to do with the Presbyterian John Witherspoon as it does with anyone else.

The common thread between these two Scriptures is that when a leader was chosen, no voting took place, God chooses. Voting never takes place in Scripture. So, if it us up to God then why vote? Especially when we look at history and see some of the people that have been put in place, we ask, were they put in place by God? We can think of Pharaoh, or Caesar, or Hitler, or Stalin. Why do we vote?

There is a misconception that democracy is in some way a Christian concept, it is not. In Russia, they vote, and Putin will win 98% of the vote. I asked one Russian about it and he said: we would rather be told who our leader is if he is a strong leader than have the chance to vote

and potentially vote in a weak leader. Can you imagine saying or even thinking that? That you would rather not vote as long as there was a strong leader in power? They are simply wired differently than we are. In Italy you have the reverse, you have new elections every 9 months because there are so many political parties that in order to form a government you have to rely on parties that have 4 or 5% of the vote.

But for some reason we feel as if voting is the right and moral thing to do, we may even feel as if it is the Christian thing to do even though Jesus and his disciples never voted in their life. I'm sorry, but democracy is not a Christian value as much as it pains me to say. We began this nation as a matter of principle based upon money. We are not going to be taxed without having a voice. It was a political decision based on finances, not a Christian decision.

So I ask again, if it is up to God, then why vote? Because God has placed us in this country with the responsibility of being his hands and his feet. As DeLafayette Awkward told me, we are called to be set apart for the purpose of having the most impact as possible upon this world. We had someone stand before us this morning who represented all of the vets who went before and have gone after him so that we could have that responsibility. In some ways we are given the responsibility to discern the will of God.

It is our responsibility to do that which God has done in history to discern the heart of those running for office. Leadership is based both on qualifications, like the disciples and divine choice. But these verses remind us also of the flaws that we have. Peter, the traitor, becomes the head of the church. The church meets no failure or deceit in the world that it has not first encountered itself. Even among those who founded and led the first congregations.

This week, God is allowing us to be his hands and his feet. Before you vote, say the prayer that you find in vs. 4. Lord, you know everyone's heart. Show us which one of these two you have chosen. Let's say that together. I can't wait to see all of you next week. We are going to ask the question: Now what? As we look at Romans 13, I encourage you to do some reading ahead of schedule and read chapter 13, and hopefully it will give you some insight. I'll for you this week. Amen.