

# Sermon Text for November 10, 2024

By Rev. Robert K. Bronkema

## ***I Kings 17:4-7, Matthew 16:5-12*** ***“Now what?”***

I had an interesting encounter this past Wednesday at the Lancaster County prison. I was sitting inside the waiting room and another chaplain was there and we were each waiting for our people to come so we could visit. He struck up a conversation and said to me what a great day to be a Christian today, knowingly referring to the election. As if an election can in any way make our day as Christians any better or any worse. I mentioned that and I said that I don't believe that God takes sides, certainly hasn't chosen one political party or one political candidate over another. I could feel the temperature rising a bit in the room and I was thinking to myself I'm about to get into a fight in prison which is probably the worst place and time to do something like this. We began speaking about Bonhoeffer and agreed that the ends never do justify the means and that his participation in an assassination attempt against Hitler was not a good thing.

But for all of us in this room we should be asking the question now what, and this is based not so much on who we voted for, but rather based upon our relationship to Jesus and our responsibility as people of faith. Now what, what are we called to do now that this election is behind us which we had been hoping for months to put it behind us. You see our future, and God's presence is not defined by an election. Isn't that the opposite of what we have been hearing over these past months. That our future depends on this election. As Christians we know better, our future depends on God and our ability to see God at work as we love him and love our neighbor.

The answer to the question Now what is going to look different if we what we define ourselves by the most is by our political affiliation. There is a different answer, but a common one, for those who are disciples of Jesus Christ, and that is why we are gathered here because we are His disciples and we are looking to understand how to live in this world that is so confusing and divided. God's presence in our lives, God's presence in the church, God's presence in the nation cannot be defined by an election. Just like our future is not ultimately defined by an election. Covid taught us that, we have no control over what we consider to be our future because at any moment an intervention can take place which is beyond our control.

Scripture warns us today to live our lives based upon the basic principle that God is faithful, God provides, God does not take sides and any teaching to the contrary is heresy. Let's read.

## READ

We find ourselves solidly back in Matthew. For those of you who may just be joining us in our sermon series on January 14, 2023 we began our sermon series the Gospel of Righteousness and here we find ourselves almost two years in. We have defined righteousness as acting according to the will of God and we have seen how our lives as disciples and followers of Jesus is more than thinking correctly, but it is acting according to God's will, which is defined ultimately just by two simple concepts, loving God and loving our neighbor. You can't separate the one from the other. You can't love God if you hate the stranger and you can love the stranger fully and completely if you don't love God.

We begin finding the disciples who have just landed their boat on the shore and so they missed the previous verses, what Jen taught us last Sunday, this encounter between Jesus and the Pharisees and Sadducees. It was one of those instances where the heat in the room had been turned up a bit with Jesus calling them an adulterous generation because they asked for a sign. I should have tried that, but what Jesus pulls off, often we find ourselves wanting when we try. Jesus responded last week that the resurrection is going to be the only sign that you will ever need. That response was more for our sake than for theirs.

He basically tells them in their desire to see a sign is that it is the epitome of hubris to think that God is at work to bring you favor on this earth over and above anyone else who might be walking on this earth. What makes you, oh Pharisee and Sadducee a person of favor over the Samaritan who scratches out a living day after day. God bringing eternal life to His disciples is a sufficient enough sign for us to live on without the need of demanding a sign of favor from God.

The disciples know nothing of this previous exchange and all that we read is that they are somewhat bothered, if not distraught, over the fact that they forgot the bread on the other side of the sea and so the assumption is that now they are without and so they are going to go hungry. Their daily need is not going to be met. They were about to become a group of hangry disciples and there is nothing worse than hangry disciples. Let's be clear, their need is real. They need food. Let's be clear, the need that people have today is real as well. The election was decided on real needs that people have, not some made up issues that we want to focus on. If your needs are being met you want to find someone who is going to meet those needs. That's clear.

But Jesus reprimands his disciples in vs.8 because of their concern for a lack of bread and calls them ye of little faith. That is one of Jesus' favorite phrases to describe his disciples, the band of those with little faith. It's not a good thing, let's be clear, but their actions and their words reflected a people of little faith. In this instance they deserve this moniker for Jesus points

out to them what he had just been through with the Pharisees and Sadducees which was significant and important, a matter of eternal life and death and all that they are worried about is how much food they have in the boat?

He goes on and says first of all you are worried about bread, really? Vs.9 don't you remember when I fed the 5,000 thousand in Matthew 14:19, then vs.10 don't you remember then the 4,000 that I fed in Matthew 15:34. This was just a few days ago, or maybe a few weeks ago and now here you are worried about bread again. The sheer number of people that Jesus fed was supposed to remove completely from the disciples any doubt about God's provision in their lives. God provides, God will give you what you need. You have to remember that, folks this is true in our lives as well. We become desperate when we are without and we tend to forget the provision of God in our lives.

We forget how God provided for Elijah, even sent the ravens to feed him as a demonstration that we will never find ourselves without. The faithfulness of God can never be forgotten or usurped by our actions to compensate for what we feel is God's absence. Don't worry about the things that you can't control, handle the things that you are given. All of this teaching in Matthew begins by Jesus responding to the disciples' anxiety and worry over bread by him warning the disciples about the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees. We understand at the end of these verses that the disciples finally understand that Jesus wasn't speaking literally about bread, even if that was all they could think about, but rather about their teaching.

So the leaven of these religious leaders his disciples are told to run away from for it is heresy. The interesting thing is that the Pharisees and Sadducees had no teachings in common except for one. They disagreed on the resurrection. They disagreed on the purity laws and the other laws on the books. They disagreed on customs that needed to be followed and how they ought to be followed. They were epic antagonists to each other. But there was one teaching that they agreed upon and it is this one about which Jesus warned his disciples.

They agree what the Messiah when he came what he would do and what he would look like. They agreed that the Messiah would be strong, a conqueror, a macho military leader riding on a horse, one who showed resolve and looked people in the eye and told them what he thought. They both agreed that Jesus was absolutely not that Messiah because he did not have any of those attributes. This was the only common teaching that they had and we see later that it is around bringing Jesus to death on the cross where they were able to unite because they both taught that Jesus was a fake.

Beware of the yeast, the leaven the false teachings. I wish I could say that today we don't have to worry about the church and false teachings, but I have to tell you I am seeing something that is heresy at its worst, as if heresy at its best could be any good at all. It is heresy for a church to align itself with any political party. I have seen progressive churches align itself 100% with political principles espoused by the Democratic party. I am seeing conservative churches aligning themselves 100% with the Republican party and what is worse, describing its leader in religious Messianic terms. This is heresy, this is the false teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees who defined Jesus as someone that he was not. The more things change the more they say the same.

We aren't the first to do it in history. It began with Constantine aligning himself with Jesus and then aligning Jesus with the Roman Empire. It continued with the Roman Church and seeing Jesus as the one who gave them the right to the Inquisition and defeat and kill the infidels. It continued on in Germany with the Lutheran Church aligning itself completely with Hitler and his goals for a nation that would reflect the kingdom of God, one purified and whole and composed of only a single race without the riff raff. We think we find ourselves in unique times, well, they may be unique for us, but for our faithful God in whom there is no changing, he's seen this before and it doesn't end well.

So now what? Two things I want you to take away from this in what we find in Scripture. Jesus tells his disciples to remember what he had done with the bread, and so we are commanded to remember what God has done in history and in our lives. We are called to remember God's faithfulness to all people. We are called in the words of Psalm 145:4 that one generation shall laud your works to another and shall declare your mighty acts. If we forget then we will find ourselves in the same position as the Israelites in Exodus 17:7 where they are asking if the Lord is among us or not. God's presence is not defined by the result of an election in a single country on the face of the earth that he created.

If God is a faithful provider which both of our Scriptures point to, then no disciple should be threatened by insecurity. Once the kingdom is established in our lives then mundane, and I mean that in the sense of earthly, not insignificant, they should no longer cause anxiety. That is the first point.

Now what second point is that we are to run away from the false teachings of churches that want to make this election as some kind of holy mandate. There is without a doubt a political mandate that has been won, that we cannot deny and should not deny. But the church's

mandate does not change at all. We are still going to pursue Matthew 25 because our mandate is with Christ and Christ alone. Amen.