

2020-11-01 Election 2020 and a Plan for Reopening

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[Music Intro]

[Male voice] The following is a presentation of Artisan Church in Rochester, New York.

[Voice of Pastor Scott]

I have two scripture readings for you today. And, spoiler alert: I'm going to be talking about the election following this. And so let these words maybe prepare you for that moment. For Matthew 22 verses 35 through 40.

One of them, a lawyer, asks Jesus a question to test him. Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest? He said to him: You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment and the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

And the 2nd reading is from John Chapter 15 verses 10 through 13.

If you keep my commandments you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. I've said these things to you so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. This is my commandment: That you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this to lay down one's life for one's friends.

If I don't come back around to the idea that following the commandment to love one another is a commandment given to us so that the joy of God might be in us, please know that that is always in the back of my mind throughout all the things I'm about to say to you. We are taking a break today from the new series which we actually just started last week. And the reason for that is that it's the last Sunday before the election and I have some thoughts to share with you. So this week I went back through all of the sermons that I have given on the Sundays before presidential elections. Now I'm quite a young person but I have been at this a little while. My first Sunday before the presidential election sermon was Obama McCain 2008. Now there are all kinds of Bible verses that have some relevance that I could go to in this moment. I could be

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talking about God's Kingdom versus human governments. I could be talking about how you shouldn't put your trust in princes all of that kind of thing. And I have preached on those ideas in previous years, but this year I'm not going to talk about any of those things. Because that's not what this election is about to me. To me this election is about something much bigger than that and much simpler than that and something that is, I think, more fundamental to the Gospel way than any of those other topics might be. You see, this election, to me, is about loving one another. Which is not terribly surprising because as much as I can discern that God has given me a word to speak to my congregation for the last seven or eight months it is love one another. You have heard me say that, you have seen me post it on the Artisan social media accounts and on my own if you are unfortunate enough to follow me on there. And that's not to say that these passages about God's kingdom don't have any bearing on what is going on right now because they do. It's just that I am only really capable of and have only ever really been capable of preaching the word that is resonating for me in the moment. And to me, right now, as I think about the election the word that is resonating for me at the moment is: love one another.

So, this as an idea very much influenced the way that I voted. I voted this past Monday, and when I voted I voted for the presidential candidate who I think better exemplifies that commandment. For the one who inspires me to love others more, rather than less. And the one yes, whose platform, while far from perfect, seems more likely to me to help us as a nation love one another. But mostly, the reason that this idea is resonating for me with regards to the election is not about policy at all. And honestly it's not even about personality or character although those things do matter to me too. And I know that all of that matters to you as well and you have to make the right decision for yourself. I am not preaching a sermon that is intended to convince *you* to vote the way *I* did. As you know I would consider that contrary to my duties as a pastor, as I think about engaging with the public... with public policy and with politics. No, instead today I'm preaching a sermon that is intended to exhort you toward radical Christian love no matter who you voted for, and, very importantly, no matter who anyone else votes for. Because to me, loving our neighbors in 2020 has to start with, at least has to include, assuming the best about each other. And wow, has that gotten a 1000 times harder lately. I really do believe that one of the most toxic consequences of the past several years is that we all love each other less. You know that that you know that that is true. We all love each other less Now am I saying that assuming the best about people who disagree with your politics is more important than whatever terrible policy a candidate implements or proposes that's likely to set the world on fire in one way or another? Well, not exactly, no. I'm not saying it's more important, but I am saying that I think it's more fundamental. Let me try to explain what I mean by telling you a little personal story.

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Did anyone else take this silly New York Times refrigerator quiz this week? Do you know what I'm talking about? They had hundreds of people open up their refrigerators and take a picture of what was inside and then they paired up those photos with whichever presidential candidate each person said they were voting for. And the quiz was to take a look at the pictures and then try to tell: Was this a Trump voter or a Biden voter who submitted the photo? And boy I thought this was going to be so easy. I figured it would be like: Ok here's some organic tempeh and a New England IPA - that's a Biden voter. This person has a 2 liter of grape crush soda and for some reason refrigerated their potato chips. That's a Trump voter. You know? But I went through and I did probably 40 or 50 refrigerators, and I could not get above 50 percent no matter how long I tried. In fact I was below 50 percent for a while and I said I'm just going to keep doing this until I get to 50 percent and then I'm going to stop. I might as well close my eyes and just click the buttons randomly and I would have had an equally accurate result because it turns out that my hilarious predictions about what different types of voters keep in their refrigerator were just wrong and insulting. And I don't know why this stupid little refrigerator quiz landed with me in the way that it did but for me it revealed some significant prejudice that I have. Not about a candidate, but about the candidate's followers. And I like to think that somewhere maybe in Mississippi there's a pastor who has different political commitments than I do who took that quiz and had the same type of experience. Because how can I ever hope to get to the point of laying down my life for my neighbor if I can't even look in their refrigerator without thinking that they're a joke?

Please understand I am not shooting for "kumbaya" here... I'm not trying to say: Can't we all just join hands and get along regardless of our silly little political differences? Because I believe there are absolutely critical matters at stake in this election and we have to take it seriously. And for me part of that means that I have to acknowledge the fact that for the most part I am not likely to be affected as an individual by the worst aspects of *any* presidential administration or gubernatorial administration or mayoral administration. And I am certainly not trying to ask anyone who is part of a marginalized population to absorb any kind of oppression - to seek it out. And I don't mean to let myself or other privileged people off the hook of fighting for others because after all that is exactly what loving your neighbor looks like. The point that I'm going toward here is that we can feel passionately about politics and about how deeply terrible the other side's candidate is *and* we can fight to the bitter end for the people we love and as we think about our neighbor. You have to know hatred and resentment and disdain are not fruits of the Spirit and so when our politics lead us to hatred and resentment and disdain - not for a candidate, but for the voters who vote for that candidate - we need to watch our step because

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that is not evidence of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Jesus said that if your right hand causes you to sin you should cut it off and that if your right eye causes you to sin you should gouge it out.

Ok, I think that we could probably say that if your preference for a presidential candidate causes you to sin as it has caused me to sin this past week and many times prior, we might need to consider whether or not there's something that needs to be cut off or gouged out of us. And by the way, on a pragmatic level, no one has ever changed their mind while under attack. In fact we know that the opposite is true - the more argumentation you are presented with the more solidified you become in your own view. So even if all you care about is the end result of different policies being implemented it would behoove you, on a practical level, to start with love. Now I know that what I'm about to say is the stupidest, most trite pastor thing to say, but I don't know that it's ever been more true for me to say that I'm preaching to myself here today. This is an enormous challenge, but I am really entirely convinced that this is what will get us through come hell or highwater on Tuesday. Jesus said the greatest commandments are to love God and to love our neighbors. Jesus said that the way we love our neighbors is to lay down our lives. If we can figure out how to do that it really does not matter in the end who wins an election. But the good news is that if we can manage to do that, that will be our witness in the world. That will be our participation in the Gospel, in the good news that God has for all humankind. If we can manage to continue to love our neighbors as ourselves regardless of who's in the Oval Office or city hall or the state house then our witness is strengthened.

And so, I'm going to follow the advice of one of my online pastors. I have to find my pastors in other places. I hope that I'm a useful pastor to you but I'm not a very useful pastor to myself. And so one of my online pastors is a theologian named Diana Butler Bass. And she posted something this week about reading the Beatitudes. And I'm sort of expanding that to include the entire sermon on the Mount. So today, and tomorrow, and Tuesday, and for as long as I think it is to be required of me I'm intending to read Matthew 5 through 7. The Sermon on the Mount includes the Beatitudes and I clearly don't have much to offer you by way of a good example about the thing that I'm preaching on today, but I can offer you that homework assignment which is the one that I'm taking on for myself. Would you join me maybe in reading the Beatitudes and reading the Sermon on the Mount today and tomorrow and Tuesday? If you can't find time to do that let me give you a hint - in the words of Mike Tyson - turn off your station. Turn off if that's MSNBC, turn off CNN, turn off Fox News, turn off Facebook or Twitter or wherever you get your political news from long enough to read three chapters of the Gospel of Matthew. That's what I'm going to do. God knows I have been on Twitter enough over the last month to read the Beatitudes several 100 times if I had chosen to spend my time that way instead, and I probably should have. So. I know we are all really stressed by this. If you're not

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really stressed by this you're not seeing the same things that I'm seeing or you are a much better integrated person than I am which might be likely as well. This is what I have to offer you: my friends, love one another, love one another. Love one another.

[End of sermon]

[Male voice] For more information, visit us at [ArtisanChurch.com](https://www.ArtisanChurch.com).