

"I can't change the world, but I can change the world in me." – U2, "Rejoice" (from the 1981 album, October)

Is There a More Important Question than the Voting Question?

Dear Friend,

If I had five minutes to discuss the election with you around my kitchen table, I'd spend it proposing that there's one question we can't afford to neglect as we go to the ballot box. Which question?

Understandably, Christians all over the United States are pondering and discussing many questions about the presidential election:

- For whom should I vote? Is there a right answer?
- Should I vote for one candidate in order to make sure another candidate loses?
- Should I "vote my conscience" or should I be shrewdly pragmatic? Are those the same thing?
- If we avoid the ballot box due to the presidential election, won't this harm the other elections?
- Which issues are most important? Which candidate will protect religious freedom, which will help the cause of the unborn, and which will nominate good justices to the Supreme Court?
- Is there a candidate whose character is fit for the presidency?

All of these questions are worthy of consideration, of course. I'd like to suggest, though, that a different question is more important than any of these. Take a short rabbit trail with me to New Hope Christian Church in Monsey, New York, where I preached a sermon on October 2. My sermon wasn't about the election. It was about Jesus and his approach to focusing on the right question. As we'll see, though, his method can help us focus on what's most important as the election approaches.

Jesus Transforms the Lawyer's Question

During my sermon, we looked at a familiar passage – perhaps so familiar that we are apt to miss the point. In Luke 10:25-37, a lawyer asked Jesus, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus responded by asking the lawyer to expound on his area of expertise: "What is written in the law? How does it read to you?"

The lawyer summarized the law: we are called to love God with all of our being and love our neighbor as ourselves. Jesus mysteriously replied, "Do this, and you will live."

Predictably, the lawyer was not satisfied with this answer to his question. The text says that "wishing to justify himself," he asked, "and who is my neighbor?" It's as if the lawyer was saying, "How? Tell me what to *do*...specifically!" This sounded noble and innocent enough. But as Jesus responded with the story of the Good Samaritan, it became clear that the lawyer's question was not so innocent after all:



Jesus flipped the lawyer's question,
Who is my neighbor?, on its head:
Who proved to be a neighbor?

(Image: *The Good Samaritan* by Jacopo Bassano, ca. 1562, Google Art Project)

As a priest and a Levite walked on the road to Jericho one day, each saw the man left for dead by robbers, and each passed by. As Scott Klusendorf pointed out to me many years ago, we can imagine that these two passersby *felt* pity, but they did not actually *take* pity on the man. Only the third passerby on the road that day, the Samaritan, stopped to help the man. The Samaritan allowed himself to be completely put out by the project of meeting the needs of the person in front of him.

Jesus then asked, “Which of these three do you think proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell into the robbers’ hands?” Jesus’s response brought into focus the much more sinister meaning of the lawyer’s question. Ironically, although the lawyer appeared to be asking “Whom should I love?” he was actually asking the opposite question: “Whom can I *not* love? Whom can I safely ignore?”

This was the wrong question, of course, and Jesus flipped it on its head. From Jesus’s perspective, we should not ask, “Whom can I exclude?” but rather, “How can I become the sort of person who is a neighbor to anyone in need? Who should I become?”

Moving then to a point of application in my sermon, I shared some of the ways that the people in our JFA community have sought to “prove to be a neighbor” to two groups of people who have been forgotten and left for dead, literally and figuratively, on today’s “road to Jericho”: unborn children and their parents.

Transforming the Election Question

During this election time, many Christians are asking the question that seems most pressing: “For whom should I vote?” I wonder, though, if a more important question is, “What sort of person should I be?” This cuts to the heart of the election, bringing it into focus:

- Whoever becomes President of the United States, how can *I* become the sort of person who helps unborn children *myself* rather than relying on politicians to do the entire job for me?
- How can *I* become the respectful, humble sort of person who stands for the right of those who disagree with me to speak freely, trusting God to change hearts and minds?
- How can *I* become the sort of person who speaks up for those who can’t speak for themselves, even with family and friends, even when my own social comfort is on the line?
- How can *I* become a courageous person who joyfully endures persecution for my beliefs?
- How can *I* habitually pray that God helps *me* to become the person he meant for me to be?

I suggest then that as you consider “For whom you should vote?” that you take care not to allow that important question to mask a deeper, more insidious question: “What can I leave to my elected leaders to handle for me?” Instead, let’s become the sort of people who actively meet the needs of unborn children and their parents by creating conversations that change hearts and save lives. It’s only by the hard work of thousands of us seeking to become people who change minds ourselves that we can make abortion unthinkable for millions and help to bring about justice for all.

Want to become that person? Our events and online resources can help. Want to help us train thousands to become advocates in the coming months and years? Your gifts to JFA make this possible.

Yours in Christ,



Steve Wagner
Executive Director

P.S. (Updated for 2020) As the election approaches, you’ll have opportunities to discuss abortion and other important topics. Become a more confident advocate with JFA’s “7 Conversations in 7 Hours” course (www.jfaweb.org/7) or one-hour “Learn at Home Program” (www.jfaweb.org/learn-at-home)!