

COMMUNITY CHURCH OF THE MIDLANDS

***Unapologetically Christian, Unapologetically
Progressive***

Pastor's Paragraph

HOW CAN ONE VOTE AS A CHRISTIAN?

Elections. Every one of them poses a challenge for a spiritually oriented person—or one who *wants* to be. The issue, of course, is this: How does one bring spiritual values to bear when deciding for whom to vote? The truth is that most people probably never do! We make our decisions based upon what someone on radio or TV has said, the political party to which we belong, newspaper or magazine articles, social media, or the viewpoints of parents or friends, *or* a particular issue that is of concern; and those are only a few of the many possibilities that might influence us. Rarely, rarely, rarely are *spiritual* values a major consideration, *even* among persons who like to think of themselves as Christian, Jewish, Hindu, Islamic, or whatever. Without realizing it, we tend often to *compartmentalize* our spirituality, to apply it to *some* areas of our lives but not to others.

Once in a while, though, I encounter someone who is an exception. My most recent “exception” was a dear lady who is a member of one of my former churches and who regularly calls me to solicit my response to questions and issues that are important to her. Last week, her question was, “How can one vote as a Christian” in our national election this month? So she wanted desperately to bring *spiritual* values to bear on her decision making. No one else has asked me that question, but I believe that there are plenty of good

folks who would like to know my response to that thoughtful lady's question. So, here it goes.

My reply to my former member's question was not to tell her what to do or for whom to vote; rather, I decided to share the spiritual values that I utilize in my own voting. And, for starters, my dependence upon spiritual values always *transcends* my loyalty to any political party. Always!

Of course, most of us will have concerns about a candidate that are *not* specifically spiritual issues. Surely we would want our ideal person to have good judgment, be intelligent, experienced, knowledgeable about government, have an in-depth grasp of the Constitution, be well informed about international relations and, in order to deal effectively with the political differences of others, proven ability to work across the aisle and to compromise with other points of view to avoid dysfunctional gridlock—which, of course, is the essence of an effectively working democracy. Understandably, there may be other desirable characteristics for any potential candidate, depending upon one's party and personal preferences.

But where do we go from there? What specific *spiritual* practices we can apply in our decision making process?

Frankly, from a specifically *spiritual* point of view, I am not *completely* at peace with *either* of our two major presidential candidates this year. Why? First, I see desirable *and* undesirable points in both party platforms and in the viewpoints of both candidates. Second, I am not *completely* pleased with either candidate because both of them appear to play fast and loose with the truth! One of them probably did not tell the truth about something in the past; and, according to non-partisan fact checkers, the other candidate knowingly makes false statements in almost every speech and even in a book. (Each candidate has published one or more books!) Neither of them appears to be exemplary in the

truthfulness department, although one might be considered more so than the other.

However, since neither candidate seems to be a paragon of virtue in the area of truthfulness, I am forced to discount the veracity in this election. Moreover, to be fair, we all need to ask ourselves: Have *I* ever lied? Is the pot calling the kettle black on this issue? Since every *one* of us has lied at some time (or times) in his or her life, do those occasional indiscretions mean that we lie about *everything*? Of course not. For the most part, each of us probably tells the truth most of the time and generally is an admirably trustworthy person. With that in mind, I think that, without our realizing it, the trustworthiness issue can be overblown. The *spiritual* principle here (to use Jesus's metaphor) is to take the log out of our own eye before we become overly censorious about the speck of sawdust in someone else's eye—even if it's *more* than a speck!

But let's go a bit deeper. Jesus taught us to be on guard against *inauthentic* persons, those who present themselves “in sheep's clothing” (that is, *appear* to be harmless) “but inwardly are ravenous wolves” (persons who have the capacity to do great harm). That appears to be good advice, but how can we tell the difference between candidates who are harmless and those who might be potentially harmful? Jesus gives us a very important guideline: “You will know them by their *fruits*.” Look at the full sweep of their lives, and certain characteristics will be obvious. Jesus called those “fruits.”

Fortunately, the New Testament gives us a list of some of the most *important* fruits or characteristics of a person in whom the Spirit of God is present. These are the fruits of the Spirit: *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control*. So it is *those* characteristics that will help us to discern the difference between sheep and wolves, people who might be able to help us and those who are likely to hurt us.

The issue, then, for any *truly* spiritually-oriented person, is to look at each political candidate in the light of his or her “fruits.” Does this person relate *lovingly* to other people (including perceived “enemies”)? Does the individual appear to be *joyful*? Is he or she a *peaceful* person? Does the candidate exemplify *patience* with those who annoy him/her? Is the person’s demeanor toward others marked by *kindness*? Has the individual lived a life that is characterized by *generosity*, working regularly for the good of others, or has he or she lived mostly for him or herself. Is the person *gentle*—or belligerent? Does the candidate manifest *self-control* in both speech and action?

All of the aforementioned characteristics are crucial because, for better or worse, a president inevitably is a role model for our children as *well* as for the rest of us; and those qualities are imperative for dealing effectively with both allies *and* enemies.

What would happen if each of us always were to utilize the biblical spiritual principles as ultimate guidelines for our decisions about a political candidate? Would our nation be *better* for such an emphasis? I think so. In fact, these are the ingredients that make it possible for what Jesus called the kingdom of God to become more fully a reality on earth. The truth is that a *political* party will never be able to make that happen. It is only when people such as ourselves summon the courage to apply vital *spiritual* principles in our personal decision making and our voting that such an event can become a reality.

But let’s be realistic. No human being will incarnate *all* of the fruits of the Spirit *100% of the time*. So the issue always will be, who most *nearly* does so *most* of the time? If we wait to cast a vote until the *perfect* candidate appears, we will *never* vote! But, for the *truly* spiritually-oriented person, *not* to vote is not an option. The reason is that we have a spiritual mandate to “let our light shine” in *every*

situation, and never to withhold it! Utilizing spiritual values in our voting is one of the best ways in which we can be *instruments* through whom the light of God shines to make our lives and our world a more ideal place in which to live.

I cannot tell you for *whom* to vote, but I have tried to be helpful by sharing with you the spiritual values that inform my own voting. Although those values would be excellent guidelines for *any* religion, or even for persons who espouse *no* religion, I can assure you that they are absolutely necessary *if* one wishes to vote as a Christian.

May God bless you as you make your *own* decision.

With best wishes and a heart full of love,

Your pastor and friend,

John

IT'S HAPPENING AT CCM!

November, 2016

A Note to Our Visitors: Although we usually gather for worship, education and fellowship on the second and fourth Sunday of each month, November will be an exception. Because of Thanksgiving, we'll be gathering this month on the second and THIRD Sunday. We look forward to seeing you!

Sunday, November 13 (Second Sunday of the Month)

10:00 a.m. A TIME TO GROW

As you may know, we have begun a new series with no book to read! Instead, we'll be using a qualitative video as a basis for learning and discussion. This Sunday, we'll

explore some helpful ways in which we can develop a deeper, better informed understanding of the Bible—more mature approaches that will enable us to profit from biblical wisdom than we may have been able to do in the past.

Depending upon the extent of our group’s involvement in whatever discussion takes place, we’ll adjourn between 11:30 a.m. and 12 noon. Afterward, anyone who wishes to do so is welcome to join the Lunch Bunch for a bite to eat and some great fellowship, as well!

Sunday, October 16 (THIRD Sunday of the Month)

10:00 a.m. A TIME FOR WORSHIP

Because Thanksgiving Day arrives during the third week of November, we’ll be having our annual Thanksgiving worship on the third Sunday. John will share a somewhat unusual message with us, after which we’ll have an opportunity to observe Holy Communion.

As is our custom on Thanksgiving, Christmas, Mothers’ Day and Easter, we will not have our usual discussion following worship. Consequently, we will adjourn a bit earlier than we ordinarily do—between 11:00 and 11:30 a.m. However, the Lunch Bunch will still “do its thing” at the close of our worship time!

ANNOUNCEMENTS

WHO’S HAVIN’ A BIRTHDAY?

Our outstanding “IT guy,” Mark Fox, will commemorate his birthday on November 9th. Moreover, our wonderful soloist, Evelyn Clary, will be celebrating her natal day on November 13th. Not to be outdone, always-helpful Betty Jean Sullivan will be celebrating hers on November 28th. We wish all *three* of you a happy, joy-filled “new year!”

LOOKING AHEAD

On Sunday, December 11th, we’ll have an intimate Christmas gathering at a local restaurant. Details will be announced at our Thanksgiving service as well as in the December 2016 newsletter. You are welcome to invite family members and friends to join us for the occasion.

Also, on Sunday, December 25th, we’ll gather for our Annual Christmas Worship and Traditional Candle Lighting Service. As usual, it will be held at 10:00 a.m. in our Worship Center at 7 Oaks. In order to maximize valuable time with your family at Christmas, there will be no discussion this Sunday following worship. Consequently, we will adjourn earlier than usual.

Please mark these two special Christmas events on your calendar.