

Congregational Church of the Messiah

Sunday, November 2, 2008

Vote for Christ

Matthew 6:24, 33; 7:24-29

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There are many ways to vote—with our feet, our hands, our heads and our hearts.

Jesus used the first three to reach the fourth. He walked where the people walked in the market place, beside the lake, along dusty roads. The people used their *feet* to come to where He was. Jesus did not shy away from being in the middle of tough places—the crowded public temple or on the personal, painful cross.

Jesus reached out His *hands* and touched people—healing them from of sickness or demonic spirits, lifting up the lame so they could walk, blessing the bread and the cup at the Last Supper with his disciples before being betrayed by one of them to be crucified. Jesus used His hands to vote for you and me. When we choose to follow Him, we experience living abundantly on earth. Jesus said, “I have come that you might have life and have it more abundantly.” (John 10:10)

Jesus used His brilliant *mind* to share the meaning of the Laws and Prophets with others. Jesus fully understood the laws, applied the meaning and illustrated their eternal truths from God. Jesus used His mind as a 12 year-old boy in the temple in Jerusalem to question the elders. I can imagine Him challenging them about how they understood God’s Word, wondering why they practiced sacrifices as they did, asking innocent questions as a child often does that cuts right to the core of what is being said but what the people did not want to hear.

I am reminded of a Sunday school class that was memorizing the Psalm 23. After going through it once together, the teacher then asked if any of the students would be willing to try to say it alone. After a couple of the students repeated the Psalm, a little girl raised her hand and went up to the front of the class. Quietly but confidently, she began in a clear small voice: “The Lord is my Shepherd.” Then she paused for what seemed a very long time. Finally, she said in a very sure voice, “That’s all I want forever!” and ran back to her seat.

Jesus used His intelligence to synthesize and combine the knowledge of the laws of nature, the actions of humans, and the eternal Will of God into simple stories that tell eternal truths. We call them parables. In the parable about the two builders, Jesus emphasized the importance of a foundation for a house that can stand wind and rain. In the parable about the prodigal son, Jesus told about a man losing a son and rejoicing when the son comes to himself and returns home. In the story about a rich young man who had everything except peace in his heart, Jesus saw his sincerity and knew the man had really been trying to do everything he had been taught to live a righteous life. Jesus complimented the young man on how well he had done and that he was close to the kingdom of heaven.

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He lacked only one thing: “Give away all your possessions to the poor, and you will have riches in heaven and come follow Me.” (Matthew 19:21) The young man turned away downcast. He was so dependent on his worldly possessions that he dared not trust God to provide.

Jesus said, “No man can serve two masters, for either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot love both God and money.” (Matthew 6:24)

We have just had an unexpected and disastrous collapse in our national financial markets that has and will continue to affect us all in America and the world. The love of money seems to have been, without argument, the driving force that built “Houses of Financial Futures” on sand rather than on solid rock. The wind came; the rain came down; and great was the collapse of those financial houses in which people had put their trust.

Jesus was intelligent enough to tell simple stories about where to build so people would listen and learn and hopefully choose to be wise in their choices of where to build, where to put their trust.

Not everyone in the world gets to vote. Some countries do not get even close to having democratic elections. Some rulers are in such complete power that they believe there is no need to give the people they rule any voice in the government.

That is the way it was in Jesus’ day. The Romans controlled and ruled the city and area around Jerusalem. The professional religious Jewish people controlled and ruled over average Jewish persons and helped keep them quiet for the Romans. There was no voting of any kind, and yet the truth of Jesus’ teachings is so clear. “You cannot serve two masters...” (Matthew 6:24a) “After Jesus finished speaking, the crowds were amazed at his teaching for he taught as one who had real authority—quite unlike the teachers of religious law.” (Matthew 7:28-29)

Later in this month of November, we celebrate our Congregational heritage of the Pilgrims with a traditional Pilgrim style Worship Service on the Sunday nearest to Thanksgiving Day.

Most Americans will not pause to thank the Pilgrims. Without the Pilgrims, we probably would not have the right to vote this coming week. We might have become a colony of England that did not have the right to vote for a king or queen.

It is so easy to forget the sacrifices made by the Pilgrims leaving their homeland in order to be free to worship God as they chose and establish their own form of government, which included voting. They dared to create a nation built on the solid rock of their faith in the God known to us through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. This triune understanding of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit is the foundation on which our freedoms in America rest.

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“IN GOD WE TRUST” is on our money. I wonder if people who do not trust in God would be willing to stop using money that has those words stamped on every coin and bill they use.

So “hats off” to the Pilgrims for our right to trust in God and the freedom to vote for whom and how we will be governed.

Now it is up to us to choose how to use our hands, our feet, our heads and our hearts so they reflect our beliefs in practice. One way is by being in church on Sundays. Whether here or in some other house of worship, your presence is a clear, unmistakable way you show that you believe this is where God wants you to be at this time of the week. If you and I were in a bar drinking it up instead of being here in a church praying and listening, we would have clearly been voting for a different set of values and beliefs.

Jesus was clear. Sand is temporary, so is most of what we see and do during a day. Each day we invest part of life’s energy in things around us. God knows how much we invest of ourselves in temporary things—things that are here today and gone tomorrow, things that can rust and gather dust and over time simply disappear from being beautiful or useful and finally are worth nothing and are just thrown away.

Sand in an hourglass trickles down ever so slowly from the top bowl, through the narrow center, and into the large bowl at the bottom. Could this be like life? We are given life full of potential and a limited number of years, which we do not know. As we live each day, some of that sand passes through the narrow, present neck into the larger bowl underneath, and life begins to gradually ebb away. Just trying to save the sand and keep the present from taking any of our life away does not work. We only have the present to live—not the past or the future.

So where do we build, where do we place our time, talent and treasure? On temporary things that may or may not exist in the future? On shifting things that may or may not provide a return either short or long?

Jesus said we should build on the spiritual qualities God has given us: Love God first and our neighbors as ourselves. Jesus said invest your heart as well as your hands, feet and head in the things of the spirit, and you will have treasure in heaven. The way to vote for Christ is to choose a fruit of the spirit and let that be the quality of life shown in your own thinking, and speaking and relating to other people.

Paul names the fruit of the spirit in his letter to Galatians. They include the qualities of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. (Galatians 5:22) When these become your regular character traits then you are living with the fruit of the spirit.

You vote for these qualities with your feet by evidencing them when you walk among people, when you volunteer to invest some of your day to assist an organization or individual who has a need you can help to meet.

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You vote for fruit of the spirit with your hands when you invest part of your time dialing and talking or remembering someone, or helping the church get the *Messenger* ready for others, or any number of wonderful ways of expressing the fruit of the spirit from God through you to others.

Sometimes you know the result of your vote immediately. Sometimes the process takes much longer. Sometimes you may never know how much the time you spent with a person influenced his or her life. It may have come at a critical turning point when life was tough for him or her. You may have received more than you ever expected as the person thanked you or as God blessed you for simply being there.

Just as Jesus taught people who were not allowed to vote in His day to make their lives count for God, today Jesus teaches us how to use our feet, hands, heads, and hearts to vote for Him. The world around us is always changing. Part of our task as followers of Christ, is to use the gift of life and resources with which God has blessed us to help transform the world so it fills up with the fruits of love, joy, peace, and reconciliation.

The values of the world are well financed and have an awesome appearance. The buildings they erect are enormous, elegant, lighted through the night but all are built on the sands of man's lesser self—the self that does not care about what happens to others but simply seeks its own pleasure.

Our God cares about each person high or low, mighty or weak, sad or happy, sick or well. We are God's people as we continue to pray and reach out in whatever way is effective to build God's kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.

The quality of Christ's character, as well as His wisdom and total connection with God, shows us the Way to live together and with God. We have some of that same character in us, and we need to let it be primary in our lives so we are always sharing some of the fruit of the spirit in whatever we do.

You vote for Christ today when you reach out with God's love sharing God's blessings with others. Freely have you received from God—freely give. Your vote for Christ counts for a better world.

AMEN.