

December 4, 2016
Second Sunday in Advent
Isaiah 11:1-10

This past presidential election on facebook I saw quite a few pastors posting admonitions against voting for Donald Trump because of his past or because of some of the things he said. Other pastors would respond with admonitions against voting for Hillary Clinton because of her past or because of some of the things she said. I didn't post anything because I don't think pastors should endorse candidates, but inwardly I did have a very curt response to them all: Jesus isn't on the ballot.

Now what I meant by that was if you're looking for a morally perfect person for president, you're not going to find one. But when I started studying our reading for this second Sunday in Advent that phrase came back to me; Jesus isn't on the ballot.

It struck me that a lot of people think of Jesus kind of like some divine candidate for whom we can cast our vote. Some churches are pretty overt with this saying, "You've got to make a decision for Christ." But even catechized Lutherans can think that Jesus Christ is my Lord and Savior because I believe what the Bible says about Him and what He does for me and the blessings I receive from Him so, sure, of course I'll take Him as Lord and Savior. It can be like we weigh the options of receiving Him or not receiving Him as Savior and it's a no-brainer; so we vote "yes" to Jesus!

But consider God's prophecy through Isaiah: *"There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit. And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. And his delight shall be in the fear of the Lord. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide disputes by what his ears hear, but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; and he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked. Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist, and faithfulness the belt of his loins."*

Does any of that make you think you have any say whatsoever as to whether this person is Lord or not? Does it sound at all like anybody has a choice in accepting His judgment? Does it sound like the wicked can stand up and say, "I didn't vote for you and I don't accept the breath of your lips destroying me"?

I don't think John the Baptist can make it any clearer that the coming Christ is Lord, King, judge and whatever other authority above all authorities! *"He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."*

You do not get to vote "no" to unquenchable fire. Jesus is not on the ballot.

It's not hard to understand why we slide into thinking we have some power and authority in this equation. First of all, we're sinful, and that all stems from Adam and Eve trying to grab godly authority right in the face of God. Isaiah also describes how this Messiah will come in His first advent as a humble, suffering servant. At Christmas we hear how Jesus came as a little baby, a human being just like you and me, although without the sin. We study the Gospels and know how Jesus ministered to people, serving their needs and healing their afflictions. We especially remember His cross—the whole smitten, stricken and afflicted story where Jesus seems anything

but mighty. And even in His resurrection He is still gentle and loving as He appears to His disciples and commissions them to go and spread the Gospel good news.

But the Gospel good news is not that God is some gutless wimp who so craves our approval that He is willing to serve our every need and even let us beat, torture and kill Him to forgive our sins so He can gain our endorsement and get our vote for god. The Gospel is that God looked upon how mankind's sin had messed up His perfect design of all that is and out of His love for this humanity ordained that the Son would become one with mankind in order to save mankind.

Jesus did just that, but where we were foolish and ignorant before the Father, He lived out the Spirit of wisdom and understanding. Where we selfishly glory in ourselves, He lived the knowledge and fear of the LORD in humility. Where we are panicked and powerless before death, He had the spirit of counsel and might and attacks it head-on and defeats it!

Don't let the humility fool you! Jesus is this Lord of power, might and judgment that Isaiah and John the Baptist foretell. He came humbly because that's what you and I and all of humanity needed, a human person to walk perfectly in subjection and obedience where we fail to do so. But this man Jesus was, is and ever shall be the king and judge of all that exists in heaven and earth. There is no choice. There is no ballot. Jesus is Lord and Savior.

You either believe that and thankfully receive His loving gift of redemption, forgiveness, salvation because He is your Lord on His terms and this is how He has ordained things; or you reject Him because you want to set some restrictions and make God subject to your approval—your vote.

But it could not be any clearer in Holy Scripture: Jesus' second Advent will be as judge with a winnowing fork in His hand. The axe of judgment will see the trees bearing bad fruit thrown into the fire. He shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked. Nobody will get a vote on this. On that day, your opinion won't matter.

Get this clear in your heart and mind today. Do it out of the fear of the Lord because the fear of the Lord is a good and wise thing.

But do it also out of love for the Lord, knowing that the Son of God in all His power and might chose, out of love for you, to come to earth and tackle sin and death on your behalf. He is and has always been God—the God that we in our sin so want to be even though it isn't our place—and He willingly gave that up to save a humanity that again and again and again rejects Him. He did that so that your pain and warfare would end, and instead you would possess the rest and peace with God Isaiah describes in the holy mountain of God.

When you think of your Holy Baptism remember that you had no assent to that; the Son of God who bears unquenchable fire chose to wash you through His being judged on the cross that you would stand righteous in the judgment to come. When you receive the bread and the wine remember that you aren't closing some kind of Spiritual deal; the God whose breath kills the wicked chooses to put His body and blood into your mouth that you would be forgiven and not counted among the wicked. When you hear the absolution, don't think your confession was some kind of vote for forgiveness. You begged God for pardon because you know by rights He should cast you away into condemnation forever, but He, being the God who did battle to gain you for His kingdom from Satan's realm, has mercy and in unfathomable love forgives you all of your sins.

You don't get a vote. Jesus is simply Lord, God and Savior. Jesus isn't on the ballot. He is God in the water, bread, wine and Word, for you. Amen.