

## **A Response to the Election**

October 10, 2024

Ruth 3:1-5; 4:13-17

Psalm 127

Hebrews 9:24-28

Mark 12:38-44

I'd like to begin this morning by giving my opinion on the results of the presidential election. Just kidding! I am not going to discuss politics from the pulpit. But we are going to consider our response to the week's events.

Growing up in a fundamentalist world, I was raised to understand that there was one perfect way to live, one universal standard of decency that the Bible taught and to which we must all adhere. I have studied enough of the Bible now to understand how misled I was. But I do think that believing we know what is best, our personal vision of the utopian ideal, is an easy trap to fall into. We curate our beliefs through our lived experiences, and we hold tightly to the values we form. That is a good thing. That is called wisdom. And yet, we all live different lives, have different experiences, and interpret them differently, so we do not always come to the same conclusions. Additionally, those standards are not fixed. Our own constitution provides for laws to change based on "evolving standards of decency."

We live in a democracy and have the gift of allowing our voices to be heard in the elections that shape our world. But elections are not the only way we participate in shaping our world. How we live within the structures that govern our lives is and has always been the way that God's people live out their faith. Choosing how to live within these structures is our contribution to ushering in the Kingdom of God. We live in a world marred by sin, so human kingdoms will always be flawed, even divinely ordained ones. We do not look to the state to uphold God's kingdom.

The story of Ruth is such a gift to us in this moment. Because we celebrated All Saints last Sunday, we missed the beginning of the story, so allow me to recap. Naomi, her husband,

and two sons had been living in Judah, they were Jews. But there was a famine, and it forced them to leave their home and flee to Moab. They were climate refugees living in a foreign land. They stayed long enough that Naomi's husband died. Eventually the sons married Moabite women, one of whom was Ruth. And then both the sons died, childless. By that time, the famine ended and Naomi, who was left with nothing decided to go back home. Ruth loved her so much that she chose to go back with Naomi to Bethlehem. They were together, but they were destitute. In that place at that time, women were powerless. They could not own property because they were the property. Without someone to claim them, they existed outside the social structure.

With 21<sup>st</sup> century eyes, this story can rankle. To survive, Naomi basically prostituted Ruth out to Boaz. It is upsetting to see young Ruth then marry this much older man just so she could bear children to carry on Naomi's husband's name. It's uncomfortable to see Ruth's body used as property and then have her own child given to her mother-in-law as security for their future.

But that was the world in which they lived. This text makes no judgments about the conditions of their world. It's a story about the people who lived under those conditions. The people in this story all made choices that pushed the boundaries of their existing world's structures to secure the kind of life they wanted and needed. Naomi's family left the Land of Promise. Her sons married foreign women, breaking Israel's Law. Ruth seduced Boaz. Boaz married a foreign wife and manipulated the law to acquire Naomi's husband's land. Naomi claimed Ruth's child as her own. Every part of this story demonstrates ordinary people pushing boundaries to create the life they wanted....

Then we have our sensibilities shaken again when we read today's Psalm. We read that children are a blessing from the Lord, smile, and imagine kissing chubby cheeks. But the reason David likens children to arrows is because, in the ancient world, children were weapons of war. Men needed vast numbers of children, from the bodies of numerous

women, to provide protection from invaders who threatened their property and possessions. They needed children to carry on the family name, but the bigger concern was the tribal security that additional bodies provided. It makes us squirm to think of producing babies as weapons, but that was the world in which they lived. These people saw large families as God's blessing. They accepted that world and lived into it. David's poetry here encourages the people to embrace the world in which they lived and find comfort in God's provision for them within those systems.

We end our readings today in Mark with Jesus wandering through the temple. This story is often used to teach folks to give sacrificially. But Jesus is inviting his disciples to observe the temple's workings with new eyes. He made no judgment statement about the widow's offering. Jesus was not saying poor people should give away the funds they need to eat. He is condemning the way the temple had been commandeered by the powerful to increase their own wealth. He tells his disciples to beware of religious elites who priorities their appearance, without caring about the implications of those priorities on the weakest, most vulnerable members of their community.

Jesus made a lot of enemies by instructing his followers to question and challenge the world in which they lived. Jesus was born a Jewish man and lived in a Jewish world under The Law that world understood was given to them from God's own hand. But it was a flawed system because the world is sinful. If God's own system couldn't perfect it, if Jesus himself questioned his Father's plan in the hands of sinful men, then we would be foolish to think that political structure can perform God's work on this earth.

The world has always been changing and it always will. Rulers and nations will rise and fall. Ways of living in this broken world will change for the better and for the worse. As standards of decency evolve and shift, our responsibility is to live out our own convictions. In some ways, it sure would be nice if things didn't change...if we could perfect a system and hold to it perpetually. Fundamentalists try to do that. They look back on what they

imagine was an ideal past, work to codify that system, and then force their people to uphold stricter and stricter rules. But that is not the way our God works. If it was, the story of Ruth would have been conveyed as a morality tale, including condemnation for all the ways these people disregarded “God’s ideal plan”.

But our God is making all things new through us. As the world shifts and changes around us, our role is to live with integrity. If we follow Jesus’ instructions, we ought to question the world that is presented to us. Not merely accepting injustice. But Jesus’ message is not one of political revolution. It’s about how we live.

As Christians, we are not called to evacuate one political system in search of a new one. We are called to live the gospel, to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and care for the prisoners. Each person has a road to walk. As Americans we participate in the democratic process. And some may be called to political activism. **But all of us are called to serve those the political system does not.**

I find the book of Ruth to be incredibly comforting. These were ordinary people living through the hardships of their lives, navigating complex choices, both outside and within their religious and legislative systems. The story isn’t about judging their choices. It recognizes God’s love and provision for them as they made those choices, highlighting the gift of friendship through it all. Most of us will live ordinary lives, deal with pain, and be forced to make difficult choices. Hopefully, like Ruth, we are supported by friendship and feel God’s presence through it all.

When we consider our response to American politics, regardless of our joy or sorrow over the outcome of the latest elections, regardless of the way our world may change, I pray we remember who we are. We are the ones who love, even our enemies, even the most difficult for us to love. This weekend, at the diocesan convention, we were repeatedly exposed to our motto “Love Jesus. Embody justice. Be disciples.” Every time bishop Harris

dismisses the church, she uses a blessing that instructs us to not merely pray for peace, but to actively participate in making peace.

May we be a people who actively love, even our enemies, living to create peace. Amen.