



Worship Materials

Call to Worship

Leader: Jesus *told* us to love our neighbors.

People: So we speak to each other with love.

Leader: Jesus told us to *love* our neighbors.

People: So we serve our community with love.

Leader: Jesus told us to love our *neighbors*.

People: So we care for the least among us with love.

Leader: Jesus told us to love our neighbors. Not just sometimes, but at all times.

People: So we vote with love considering how our decisions will affect our neighbors.

Leader: We love God by showing love for our neighbors.

People: Together, let us create a world centered in love.

Opening Prayer

Leader: God of Love, we gather here remembering that you have called us to love you and to love our neighbors as ourselves. As we prepare to participate in the life of our community through voting, remind us that every person in our neighborhood, state, and country bears your image and carries their own hopes, fears, needs, and dreams. Every person is our neighbor. As we consider how to vote, give us wisdom to listen and educate ourselves, humility to recognize what we may not understand, and courage to seek the common good. Keep us from contempt, division, and fear. May our participation in our democracy be shaped by compassion, truthfulness, justice, and concern for those who are vulnerable and often unheard. Help us remember that our neighbors are more than political labels, and that our calling to love one another extends beyond any election. May our words and actions today, and every day, contribute to a society where every person is treated with dignity and care. Amen.

Prayer of Confession/Transformation

Call to Confession

Leader: While we are called to love our neighbors as ourselves, there are times when our actions do not live up to our best hopes or intentions. Let us confess our failings, both as individuals and a society, so that we may be forgiven and transformed.

People: Merciful God, we confess that we have not always loved our neighbors as ourselves. There are times when we have allowed fear to become stronger than compassion. We have remained silent when others were hurting. We have looked away when our neighbors were treated unjustly. In our communities some have been denied dignity, opportunity, and safety. Too often power has been used without love. Forgive us, O God, for the times we have participated in these harms, for the times we have benefited from them without asking difficult questions, and for the times we have failed to recognize our neighbor in the people all around us. Give us wisdom to recognize injustice. Give us strength to repair what can be healed. Teach us again what it means to love our neighbor—not simply in sentiment, but in action. Amen.

Assurance of Pardon

Leader: This is the good news of hope: We are not only offered grace, but transformation and liberation. We can choose to live differently and act with love. May we leave this moment changed—not merely forgiven, but committed to becoming better neighbors with God's help.

Prayer of Illumination

Leader: Holy Spirit, help us to hear again the ancient words of our sacred texts and listen for how God is speaking to us through them. Open our hearts and minds to a new way of being together in community with love at our center. Let us listen for how God wants us to treat the poor, the stranger, the immigrant, the needy. Let us hear and be changed. Amen.

Scripture Suggestions: Amos 5:11-15, 21-24, Matthew 5:1-12

Offertory Prayer

People: Giving God, as we bring these offerings before you, remind us that generosity is more than what we place in an offering plate. How we choose to live in relationship with our neighbors is also a precious gift to you. Teach us to act as servants to one another and carry out our civic responsibilities with care. As we prepare to vote with love, may our choices be guided by compassion rather than fear and by a genuine concern for the well-being of our whole community and all of your creation. Bless all of our offerings and use them to serve those in need and make your love visible in the world. Amen.

Hymn Suggestions

New Century Hymnal - Spirit of Jesus, If I Love My Neighbor #590, This is My Song #591, Life Every Voice and Sing #593, How Beautiful, Our Spacious Skies #594, Lead Us From Death to Life #581

https://www.carolynshymns.com/by_the_streams_of_babylon.html
https://www.carolynshymns.com/god_of_love_weve_known_division.html
https://www.carolynshymns.com/in_times_of_great_decision.html

Sermon Text

As I begin I must confess to you that there are times when I struggle with the idea of how faith and democracy intersect. Because in our particular brand of faith, as followers of Jesus Christ, our ultimate aim is not representative democracy, as much as I am a big fan of that system. For an American that might seem like I'm speaking heresy, but we pray in worship every week for a particular leadership structure, and it's not democracy. We say thy kingdom, or thy Realm, or thy rule – whatever words you use – your kin-dom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. The truth is that Heaven isn't a representative democracy where the will of the people is done. Instead, we pray each week for a world where GOD'S will is done, where God is in charge. Where God is the final arbiter of all things. And that's okay because God is love and so love is in charge, not some power-hungry dictator who rules in their own best interest. Now I have no idea how this concept of government actually works out in practice because I don't live in heaven. But I also know there is no gerrymandering there so maybe it all comes out in the wash. We'll find out someday.

But if our faith doesn't have democracy as the final end game then why do we talk about voting and how important it is? Well for one thing, at present we don't live in heaven. We live here on Earth where everything isn't done according to God's will and it's certainly not done with love at the center of our laws. We're a work in progress. But while we're still in progress, we live in a country that does allow us to make choices. And one of those choices is picking who will make our laws for us, who will decide court cases for us, who will run our schools, who will keep us safe, and so on. The choices we make CAN influence whether and how God's will is done here on Earth. The people and laws we vote for can either put love at the center of our societies or determine that people's worth and dignity are based on other values like greed, scarcity, or fear. And because we have the opportunity to make this choice, to determine what kind of country and state and community we live in and how such a society not only affects us and our families, but also determines the fate of our neighbors, who Jesus commanded us to love and serve, voting is a privilege that we should respect, honor, and participate in.

But as Christians it's not enough that we simply vote. The question becomes: how should we vote? Who and what should we vote for? Our faith and beliefs can and should impact what we vote for and what we vote against. I recently heard someone interviewed about voting behavior and his advice was that everyone should just vote for their own best interest. That such a way of voting would ensure the best outcomes. But the best outcomes for who? Just for us? Just for those who can vote? That leaves out children, immigrants, those in prison or in many states any convicted felon, many disabled people, those who have been disenfranchised through voter suppression and others who are on the margins of our society. But it's those people who are left out of this equation that God holds close to God's heart as we heard in our scriptures this morning. The poor, the meek, the struggling, the left behind. Those with minimal power or voice. As the prophets and Jesus' own words tell us again and again, God wants us to pay special

attention to those the world tends to ignore or trample upon. God wants justice and righteousness for them and for us.

So if we follow Jesus we cannot vote with only our best interests at heart. We must instead vote with love. I cannot vote for things I know will hurt my neighbor or will negatively impact the poor or the immigrant or those most often left behind. I must vote with love in mind. I must vote with compassion and care and kindness and hope. That doesn't mean I only vote for a particular party or that we can't debate which policies best help us hold love at the center. But though Jesus never had the opportunity to vote he most certainly told us that such ethics must be at the heart of our lives and influence all the choices we make, including our political choices. Therefore our faith does not end when we walk into the voting booth. It extends into that voting booth and what's more it demands that we pay attention to whose lives are at stake when we cast our ballots.

I must vote against that which will cause pain and further marginalize those whom God loves. I must vote for things that will allow for shared abundance and a better quality of life for all people. I must vote for that which helps my neighbor thrive the way I wish to thrive. I must vote for peace, for healing, for an end to violence, an end to bigotry, for honesty, for integrity, and for the common good. That's what it means to vote with love. As a Christian you can't just vote for your own interests. You must vote for your neighbor's interests as well.

But there are implications for that. How can you vote with the common good or your and your neighbor's interests in mind if you don't educate yourself as to the issues at hand, as to the candidates for office, as to their proposed policies, as to the laws and policies that are being passed all around you? And I don't just mean the people or polling questions at the top of our ballots. Many of us know our federal senators and our national congressional representatives. But how many of us know more than that? How many of us also know the candidates and issues when it comes to your state senate, to your state delegates or congresspeople? How about your county council representatives or city government? We have the opportunity to vote with love for members of our school board, for our judges, for our Sheriffs, and more. And we need to know as much about those candidates and the issues around their candidacy, in addition to any ballot questions, as we know about what happens at the federal level. Because the laws that are made in our state, in our county, for our schools, for our cities and municipalities – those matter too, in fact sometimes they matter more because they have a direct daily impact on our neighbors and on our neighborhoods. Voting with love means to educate yourself and vote accordingly around local candidates and issues and national candidates and issues. I know it's not always easy to do this, but it is necessary.

But maybe you're worried about how this particular election cycle is going to go. Maybe you're concerned that the elections in November won't be fair or won't matter all that much in the scheme of things. Maybe you're worried that no matter how you vote nothing will change. What does it mean to vote with love in 2026?

First, voting with love means ensuring that everyone who is eligible gets a chance to cast their ballot. That we encourage those who are discouraged or disenfranchised to get to the ballot box or mail in their vote. Voting with love means we make sure that we are registered to vote and those around us are too. Your neighbors, friends, family members, and fellow church members. Voting with love means we create pathways for people to vote making registration easier, helping seniors or those without transportation to get to polling places, and that we make polling places as safe as possible by ensuring there is no intimidation or barriers for those who are eligible to vote. To ensure our vote counts we need to make a plan to vote as early as possible

in whatever way works best for us and we need to advocate for others to have that same freedom. Each of us should assess our capacity and ability to work towards a fair and free election. Some of us may be able to simply vote ourselves and maybe encourage others either on social media or with whatever networks are available to us. Others will write postcards. Others will phonebank. Others will volunteer at polling places. Others will provide transportation or help seniors in nursing homes. Others will register voters at local community events or simply educate people as to polling places and voting dates. But each of us can do something and together in our churches, and in concert with other organizations, we can make a difference. That's what it means to vote with love.

But beloveds know this - voting with love doesn't mean that we're going to automatically get the outcome we might desire. We might pray about this election. We might work to make sure everyone gets a chance to vote and that those votes are counted. We might volunteer or donate or show up in many different ways. And still the candidates we vote for might lose or ballot initiatives might pass or fail. Does that mean we failed or that God didn't care? I don't think so. The prophets of old, who we revere in our faith, and in whose tradition Jesus fashioned himself, often didn't succeed the first time they proclaimed God's love and truth to the world. They also didn't succeed the second time. Sometimes even the hundredth time. I would argue their messages go on thousands of years later and yet our world is still broken. But they never let that stop them. They couldn't. Because God and the world were counting on them to point out injustice, to call for a better world, and to do God's will. It was the prophets job to hold love at their center, to have the courage to name oppression and to have enough moral imagination to articulate an alternative future. To imagine and speak of a world where all beings would flourish.

When we vote with love we are called to be prophets and to vote accordingly. We vote with a better world in mind. We vote imagining a future where God's will is done. We vote with Jesus' command in our minds to love God with all that we are and have and to love our neighbors as ourselves. We vote knowing we might not get there this election, but that we will never get there if we sit at home and do nothing. We vote hoping to move the needle just a little closer to love and with a dream in our hearts that the moral arc of the universe bends just a bit further towards justice with our ballot. Brian McClaren recently wrote that "To be alive in the adventure of Jesus is to have a desire, a dream, a hope for the future. It is to translate that hope for the future into action in the present and to keep acting in light of it." To vote with love is to keep acting with that hope for the future. To keep working towards it. To keep praying for it, regardless of what happens.

So this election season I hope that you vote. But more importantly I pray that you vote with love. I know that I will be voting this November thinking of you and of all my neighbors as we work towards a more just world for all of us. Amen.