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Immanuel Lutheran Church, New York, NY
11/13/2016, The 26th Sunday after Pentecost, Lectionary 33
Malachi 4:1-2a, Luke 21:5-19
If Our Dear Lord Had Voted

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Some of you might have heard about my “The Pastor Is In Booth.”¹ Luis sets it up for me on Tuesday mornings, right here at the intersection of Lexington Avenue and 88th Street. From about 7:30 a.m. to 10 a.m. I sit at my booth with a stool across the table so that passersby can sit and talk with me. It is as many of us suspected: there are hungry hearts in the city.

For this past Tuesday, I was tempted to neglect my Pastor’s booth. I did not want to be in people’s way on Election Day -- figured I’d set the booth up on Thursday morning instead. But when I mentioned my plan to one of our members, he wisely encouraged me to continue with my Tuesday morning pattern. “In fact,” he said, “This particular Election Day above all days might be a good day for the Pastor’s Booth.”

As it turned out, he was right. A good number of people passing by on Tuesday’s sidewalk echoed the thought: This Election Day, above all days, is a good day for the Pastor’s Booth.

It is interesting that no one at my booth asked me to pray for victory for any particular candidate. But they did ask for prayer for our land and for the unity of our people. And I most earnestly prayed those prayers.

In passing, let me mention a special blessing of that day: a four-year boy sat on my stool and said a prayer *for me*. He told me that he loved God, loved his Daddy, loved his Mommy, and then he prayed for me. I told this to the one who had urged me to continue my Tuesday morning pattern with my booth, and he was pleased. He said that he feels that God has a special soft-spot for the prayers of children. I feel that way too. So, I sat at my booth this past Tuesday, Election Day.

Wednesday morning, many of us woke up and were astonished by the results of the election. I think you know me well enough by now to know that I am not going to preach politics this morning. This is important to me, out of love and respect for you, the people of God. I view preaching politics from the pulpit as a violation of your dignity in the priesthood of all believers. It is *your* Christian freedom to work out your own personal intersection of ...

✠ your understanding of the Bible

¹ See our November newsletter on our Immanuel website: <http://www.immanuelnyc.org/>

- ✦ your Christian character
- ✦ your individual responsibilities and expertise and what life has taught you
- ✦ and your estimate of the political choices at hand.

You should follow your own Christian conscience -- not my poor opinions about things.

So, I do not mean to preach politics this morning. But I do long to lift up one theme within today's Bible Lessons. I want to speak of Christian hope. In a confusing world, which is sometimes disheartening, let us speak of Christian hope.

In general, today's appointed Bible lessons have an ominous tone to them. They speak of days coming that are "burning like an oven" (Malachi 4:1). We have the famous words of Jesus about traumas and suffering before he comes again:

Nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: ¹¹And great earthquakes shall be in divers places, and famines, and pestilences; and fearful sights and great signs shall there be from heaven. (Luke 21:10-11, KJV)

So, the language of today's lessons is dark and brooding.

However within these lessons, there are a few beautiful words of hope. In our Gospel Lesson, after all his words about cosmic chaos and persecution of believers, Jesus ends with this lovely promise:

¹⁸But not a hair of your head will perish. ¹⁹By your endurance you will gain your lives. (Luke 21:18-19, RSV)

Not a hair of your head will perish. They are all safe. *You* are safe. Endure, then. Persevere, then. Continue to follow Jesus, no matter what chaos should overcome us.

So, that Gospel promise is a splendid one.

But I am especially drawn this morning to a few words in our First Lesson, from Malachi Chapter 4. These few words seem like a godsend in confusing times:

²But for you who fear my name the sun of righteousness shall rise, with healing in its wings. (Malachi 4:2, RSV)

Can a sun have wings? Oh, yes! They are the wings of the One who looked down upon the great city and said:

How often would I have gathered your children together
as a hen gathers her brood under her wings... (Matthew
23:37, RSV)

Let us believe that our Lord Jesus looks down upon our city these days after the election, and would gather us all together under his sheltering wings. The “sun of righteousness *shall* rise.” Indeed he will. Easter guarantees that! Not even death and the grave were able to sink this Sun. He *shall* rise, with healing in his wings. This is our Christian hope. This is my theme this morning.

St. Paul once said that if we hope only for *this* life, then we are selling ourselves far too short:

¹⁹If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied. (1 Corinthians 15:19, NRSV)

This life, with its victories and defeats, grinding certainties and wearying uncertainties... *this* life does not exhaust our hopes, for we seek the new world to come, wherein even death itself shall be defeated.

So, Christian hope is not to be narrowed down to this life, to this week, to this election. We should dream of a better world to come. We should look for anticipations of it and lend our hand preparing for it. We should keep alive hope for this better world to come lest we become too discouraged to fight for a better world even now.

Now what I want to do is to propose a variation on St. Paul’s saying – a modification of language that is meant to lift up our Christian hope, not only for ourselves, but also for our town and our neighbors. My variation goes this way:

If for *ourselves only* we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.

Christian hope, like Christian faith, is intensely *personal*, but it is not *private*. If we think of Jesus and are comforted thereby about our own personal salvation, but fail to think about our neighbors, then we have missed the boat on true Christian hope. We hope not just for ourselves, we hope for the whole world!

So, one of the passersby at Tuesday’s booth asked for this particular prayer: “Please pray for me that I will be able to look with love even upon those who vote for [such and such a candidate].” She worried about her heart in this election. She worried that bitterness would overcome her, and that this bitterness would lead her to break the bonds of civic regard and mutual honor within our land.

So, this is my first point about Christian hope: When the sun of righteousness rises, he is going to smile upon an awful lot of people. And some of them voted on *the other side* from how you voted! But we hope for *them* too. We hope to share heaven with *them* too. So let us despise no one along our earthly path.

Jeremiah says that a day is coming when the Word of the LORD will fill every heart:

³⁴No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, "Know the LORD," for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the LORD; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more. (Jeremiah 31:34, NRSV)

On that day, many hearts are going to be better instructed. Many hearts are going to be converted. Many hearts are going to so swell with the Word and Ways of the LORD that there will be no room left for selfish and sinful impulses. On that day, we might well find ourselves sharing heaven with people that nowadays we thoroughly dislike. So, let's start liking them again. We hope to share beatitude together. Our Christian hope is not just for ourselves, but also for our neighbors in this town, in this land.

The second and final thing I want to say for now about Christian hope is it concerns not simply the hereafter, but also the here and now. We know what our Maker is up to! He is building his kingdom – a good kingdom in which the wolf dwells in peace with the lamb, the heart of stone is replaced by a living and warm and compassionate heart, and there is no more weeping or sorrow and death shall be no more. That is what our Triune God is up to. That is where reality is heading. For us, the adventure is the meanwhile. For us, the adventure is to persevere in hope and in love no matter what is going on, no matter how strange the days are.

For all I know, if our dear Lord had voted this past Tuesday, he might have been disappointed come Wednesday morning. Maybe not. Maybe he would have been dancing in his apartment. I do not exactly know. If Jesus had voted this past Tuesday, maybe he would have been disappointed come Wednesday, maybe he would have rejoiced. But here is the key thing: He can accept the decision of our democracy, no matter what it is, and bring good from out of it. He might have voted differently from you, from me, but he can live with the vote no matter how it turned out. He can *live* with it, because he can *fix* it. He can use it. He can use it as a step toward the building of his kingdom. He has the infinite capacity to do this. He has the wisdom, the kindness, the overall feel for the complexity of things. He knows the end from the beginning. He knows how to line things up, how to fill in the gaps, how to raise up and how to lower, how to convert human hearts, even how to make a good statesman

out of a poor one. And if some statesman should refuse to go along, that too is no problem in the end for Jesus. Jesus in the One who can get things done!

Now here is a key point for you and me: The *scale* is different, but the truth is the same: You and I can work in the same manner as Jesus. We can take this surprising national election, and we can set to work on it. We can figure that this election is *redeemable*. We can throw in our strength with this election and try to bring good from out of it. At least we can renew our commitment to being good people in our own sphere of life.

Let us not imagine that these living days entrusted to us are somehow random or disconnected to the great and glorious Final Day. Let us not imagine that this past week's Election Day was simply some *meaningless* day – a day that contributed nothing to the building up of God's kingdom. Let us not suppose that it was a toss-off day – a day that our God did not and could not employ in the path toward his kingdom. Let us not imagine that *any* Election Day is somehow worthless to God. And let us not imagine that the deeds and hopes and prayers connected with Election Day were lost and wasted effort. For you, for me, there are no lost days. Each of them can be a contribution to God's kingdom, and so pray that that should be so. Jesus is the Saviour – not only of our lives, but also of our days and our labors. So, let us live and labor these days as beautifully as we can. Let us do each day's labors with as much integrity and Christian character as we can. Let us go through each of our days – even those days that seem so disappointing to us – let us go through them as if they are the best offering we can lift up to our God. When we lay our heads down at the end of each day, even an Election Day, let us each one say, "Lord, I did the best I could today. Please accept my work and use it as a building block for your kingdom. Cause all these things to work together as you have said: let them all work together *for good* to them that love the Lord (Romans 8:28)... to them that love Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory, with the Father and the Holy Spirit now and forever. Amen.