

Who's Going to Win the Election?

Dr. Stephen D. McConnell

 *Jonah 3:1-4:11*

Lily Tomlin, the great philosopher of our time, once said: "If love is the answer, could you please rephrase the question?"

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So the question this morning is, "Who is going to win the election?" It's been the question for a long time, a really long time. Too, too long of a time. Who is going to win the election? The polls are narrowing. The candidates are campaigning feverishly. The cable talking heads are talking 24 hours a day. Early voting is over. Get out the vote campaigns are in force. And come Tuesday night or Wednesday morning we will know the answer to the question, "Who is going to win the election?"

Now I'll be honest with you – I don't think it matters what candidate you are for – when Wednesday morning rolls around it's not going to feel like much of a win. Do you know what I mean? I don't think there is going to be a lot of dancing in the streets no matter what side you're on. Juxtapose this election to what happened last Wednesday night when the cursed Cubs of Chicago, waiting for their first World Series title in 108 years – finally won. Even an Indians fan can find something – at least a little something – to cheer about in that. I can say this because I'm a Cardinals fan

and Cardinal fans really don't like the Cubs. And furthermore the Boston Red Sox, the last cursed team, shook their curse at the expense of the Cardinals back in 2004. I wasn't jumping up and down for the Sox, but it's still good to turn on the TV and see a parade and dancing in the streets. There is always something to cheer about when the curse has been exorcised.

Makes me think of Jesus' story of the prodigal son. The younger of two sons goes off and blows it all and as a result wraps himself in the shroud of curse – enough to wonder if he can ever go home. But go home he does and is met by this gracious father who strips him of his cursed cloak and wraps him in the best robe and puts a ring on his finger and strikes up the band and kills the fatted calf. And would that the story ended there – with the tickertape parade? But no Jesus knows us better than that – he knows there is that older brother who when he hears that the cursed half of the family finally won, finally threw the monkey from his back – he can't bring himself to celebrate. He doesn't get it – that none of us wins unless all of us wins.

Who is going to win the election? If love is the answer, could you please rephrase the question?

It feels a little bit like the conversation we hear in the great story of Jonah. Most of us have heard the story of Jonah – especially the half of the story that I did not read. In the half of the story I did not read there is an election. And the election that takes place is that God elects Jonah to be a prophet, to be the messenger of

“...Despite what I think I am worth, that despite my weaknesses and secret sins, that despite the prediction of my neighbors and friends and enemies, God elects to love me.”

good news to a lost people. Jonah is elected to preach – sort of like John the Baptist – a message of repentance and forgiveness to what appears to be a godless people – the citizens of Nineveh. Nineveh was the capital of ancient Assyria – it encompassed, interestingly enough, what is now present day Mosul. Right now there is a great battle to win Mosul. Well in the Biblical story there is a great battle for the same place – but the strategy is to tell the good news. God is gracious, God is loving, God doesn't win until everybody wins. And Jonah is elected to tell the good news. But Jonah doesn't like the assignment, runs away, take a ship west – but God won't let him go. God won't let him go. God won't let him go. Interesting, God won't let Jonah go – and God won't let the Ninevites go. Hmm.

The father won't let the younger son go and the father won't let the older son go. Nobody wins unless everybody wins.

So the big whale swallows Jonah because

God won't let him go and now Jonah quite reluctantly goes to Nineveh to preach the good news – and horror of horrors – the Ninevites take the bait!! They repent! They accept the good news! They embrace the embracing God. And Jonah doesn't like it one bit. Not one bit. I told you, he says to God, I told you that if you had your way they would win this election. I told you that you were a gracious God, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. I knew somehow you were going to make these people winners. I knew once you started preaching good news they would start believing it. I knew that once that boy came home you would take him in. I knew that eventually they'd win the Series and there would be tickertape. But that doesn't mean I have to like it!!

And God says, Jonah, nobody wins unless everybody wins.

It might be better to rename this story of Jonah. We call it Jonah – but it's really not about Jonah. In fact that's one of the painful

things that Jonah learns – it’s not about him. It’s about God, right? God is electing. Maybe best to call this story, “God rigs the election!” Who wins the election when God is running it? Well, love is the answer to that question. Love wins the election. And when love wins the election, when God elects to love us, why then we all win. That’s the good news. That’s why we are here.

I think of that picture of Harry Truman (on the cover of your bulletin) the morning after his election. The morning after everybody including himself was sure he was going to lose to Thomas Dewey, including the Chicago Daily Tribune which went to press with the headline DEWEY DEFEATS TRUMAN --- and so there Truman stands and holds up the front page of the paper with that big smile across his face. There stands the King of Nineveh with that big smile across his face. That stands that Prodigal Son with that big smile across his face. There stands that old Cubs fan waiting for generations with that big smile across his face. That despite what I think I am worth, that despite my weaknesses and secret sins, that despite the prediction of my neighbors and friends and enemies, God elects to love me.

And not just me, but God elects to love the world. It’s a two part story, isn’t it? First act, God elects me. First act, God elects Jonah to be in his story. But then comes the second act – God elects the Ninevites. Really? God elects the Ninevites. God holds onto Jonah. Won’t let Jonah go. And God holds on to those evil Ninevites and won’t let them go either.

In C.S. Lewis’ great little parable *The Great Divorce* he imagines the citizens of hell being

given the chance to enter into heaven. And one of the citizens of hell is invited into heaven but he learns that a man who once did him wrong was in already. That somehow, someway God got a hold of that scoundrel and chose not to let go. And the man can’t do it. He can’t go in. He won’t go in if God is holding onto “that guy”.

Nobody wins unless everybody wins.

When Cardinal Bernardin of Chicago years ago was falsely accused of sexual misconduct by a confused and angry young man – after months and months of anguish of living inside the curse of false condemnation, this prince of the Church being called every name in the book – the young man confessed his sin of false accusation. And so there was no other way for the story to end but with the Cardinal saying mass for the young man. The Cardinal never did what the young man said he did. And in his homily said to his accuser – That in every family comes hurt, anger and alienation. But we cannot run away from our family. We must be reconciled.

God holds onto all of us.

So said Gordon Wilson, a good Irish Methodist whose precious daughter was killed in Belfast by a bomb set by the IRA. “Hate will not bring my Marie back,” he said. “So I bear no grudge. I pray daily for the forgiveness of her killers. Love is the bottom line.”

God’s got a hold of all of us.

So if love is the answer, could we rephrase the question? And maybe at this table we will. Maybe at this table we will get a hold of

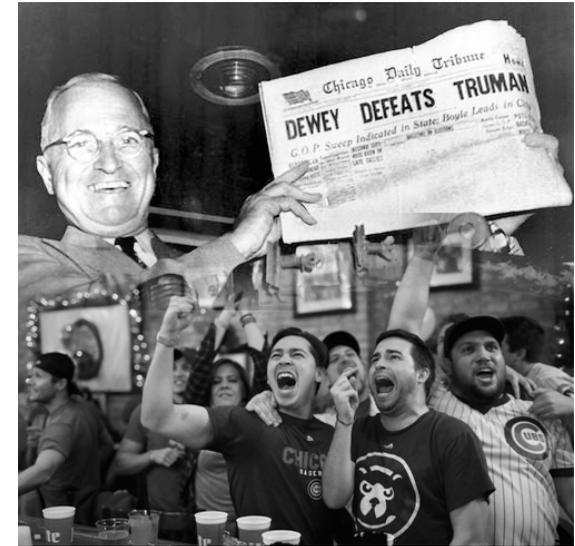
ourselves, or more importantly let the good Lord get a hold of us. Maybe at this table, joined by all the saints – joined by all the citizens of heaven – joined by all those we don’t even necessarily want to be joined by – joined by everybody else God is holding onto – we will begin to think about asking a different question. This great election question. Because the answer isn’t Hillary or Donald. The answer is love. Love is the bottom line. God elects the world in his Son.

God elects the world in his Son.

Who’s going to win that election? Oh friends, let’s hope it’s the widow and the orphan. Let’s hope it is the hungry and the sick and the lonely and the imprisoned and the stranger. Let’s hope it’s that holier than thou Pharisee and that ashamed and lowly tax collector. Let’s hope it’s Peter and Judas and doubting Thomas. Let’s hope it’s the citizens of Nineveh and the citizens of Mosul. Let’s hope it’s the Republican and the Democrat. Let’s hope it’s the prodigal son and the elder son. Let’s hope it’s the Indian and the Cub. Let’s hope it’s the Methodist and the Catholic and the Jew and the Muslim and those old sorry Presbyterians.

And let’s not just hope. But let’s accept our own election. Elected to tell the good news. Elected to proclaim the bottom line. Elected to answer the question. Who’s winning this election?

Nobody wins unless everybody wins.



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Church of the Palms

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