

Voices: No room for political fear

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Partisan politics plays on our fears. Both major political parties have decided the only way to win elections is to scare us to death: If we vote for their party, we have nothing to fear. But if we don't vote for the other party, our lives never will be the same and the destruction of our society is at hand.



Zac HarrelTherefore, every election we hear the same plea, "This is the most important election of our lifetime." I voted for the first time in 2004, so this is my seventh "most important election of my lifetime." This kind of fear inevitably makes us see politicians as messiahs and parties as our protectors.

It often is said the most-repeated Bible command is "fear not." In Christ, we no longer have a spirit of fear. This should make us pause when others try to play up our fears in order to get us to vote for them. As Christians, we are to pray and work for God's kingdom come, his will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Fear cannot guide

Ultimately, our hope is not in a political party, in a candidate, or even in our country. This truth should inform the way we think, talk and act politically. Fear cannot guide our political conviction or action.

This is not to say Christians should avoid being involved politically. We must vote our conscience. We must vote for what we think is morally good, who will advance the common good. But we must not be guided first and foremost by fear. Fear paralyzes compassion and love. Fear banishes clear thinking.



When fear is our motivation, we are willing to sacrifice what is eternally important for the seemingly urgent. When fear is our motivation, we forget the long view of the hope of the kingdom of God and give in to the lie of the existential threat of every election.

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The way Jesus talks about the kingdom of God in the Gospels instructs us not to live by fear, but with patient faithfulness. He compares the kingdom of God to a mustard seed and to leaven. Both start small, take time and flourish in unexpected and often unseen ways.

Not ultimate

Our political action is not our ultimate action. Our political allegiances are not our ultimate allegiances. The kingdom of God is our ultimate allegiance, and, therefore, everything we do, even political action, is for the advance of this kingdom.

A mustard seed takes time to grow, leaven takes time to rise, and the kingdom of God takes time to spread and grow in our communities. The politics of the urgent is not where we see the kingdom of God advance. Fear will not lead us to seek the common good. Patient faithfulness in the life of our community is where we see the advance of the kingdom of God through our ordinary lives and, yes, sometimes even through political action.

When we are governed more by the kingdom of God than fear of the other party or fear of this election, we can take the long view. We can be patient and faithful. One election will not unravel our country. One candidate will not destroy our country. And even if our country unravels, even if our republic as we know it unravels—and it will someday—we will not fear, because God’s kingdom cannot be shaken or destroyed.

No soul-selling

What this means is we must not sell our soul for one national election. We must not let the urgent get in the way of being faithful to the kingdom of God. The fear and urgency of so much of our national electoral politics is antithetical to God’s kingdom.

This is one reason to place as much emphasis, if not more, on our local politics, where we can have a much more present hand in seeking the common good and where we actually can get to know those who disagree with us. But that is another conversation for another column.

Our hope in Christ is that this world—no matter who wins our presidential election—is heading for redemption and renewal. We should seek to live as faithful citizens of God’s kingdom, patiently waiting for this redemption while actively engaged politically and yet not gripped by the false fear so evident in so much of our political discourse and action.

When we are filled with the hope of the gospel, there is no room for this fear.

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