

No, Your Vote Doesn't Count

Daniel 7: 9-14 John 18: 33-38a

It is nice to have that big season behind us now. I don't mean Thanksgiving; I mean election season which in Florida can run surprisingly close to Thanksgiving. I believe election season is the longest season of the year, except perhaps in Florida when it can seem the summer season literally will never end.

Throughout election season, voters are bombarded in increasing volumes with ads and literature proclaiming the virtue of their candidate and/or the villainy of the opponent. Every year, they say pretty much the same thing; you could simply substitute the names of the current candidates for the former and they would still work just fine.

A mid-term election meant the key issue was not simply registering voters, but also making sure they actually vote. Get-out-the-vote efforts, or GOTV, is the top strategy in any election, but particularly for mid-terms when people are more likely to skip voting and instead sit glued to their screen and watch political ads until their eye balls fall out.

In Florida, where the governor's race has been determined by tiny margins in the last three elections, and many races are nail biters, every vote counts. All eyes were fixed on the big statewide races and how close they were. Yet there was a state representative race that was decided in Palm Beach County by hand recount (eventually) that gave the victory to the Republican by less than 40 votes. So, yes, every vote does count, and whatever time is needed to ensure every vote is counted is worth the time, effort, and aggravation. We did learn that some counties do that counting better than others.

Supervisors of Election and their staff went to extraordinary lengths to make sure that every legitimate vote possible was counted before producing their results. What do you do if a voter has two marks on the same line for a particular ballot? Was one mark a stray strike of the felt tip pen, or was it indicating their intention to vote in a particular way? Think about Aunt Sally with that shaky hand of hers. Rather than simply cast out the entire ballot, a bipartisan group of officials objectively considered the ballot and had to make a decision. As many commentators said, this was truly democracy at work.

We are now in another season. No, I don't mean Christmas shopping season. Our liturgical season on the church calendar has come to a close with Christ the King Sunday. Next Sunday is also not the beginning of Christmas shopping season, but the beginning of Advent, the first Sunday in a new liturgical year. By the way, I believe the beginning of Christmas shopping season was the day after the fireworks stopped.

This last Sunday of the church year recognizes that in the last day, Jesus reigns as King over the Kingdom of God that has come to fulfillment. The notion of the King and his Kingdom go way back to the kings in Judah and Israel, to the times of Saul, but moreover David and Solomon. The idea was that sacred, anointed kings would serve God first, thereby striving to serve God's people as well as God's will, and then serving

themselves last. It never, ever, worked that way. The divine plan of reuniting heaven and earth would never occur this way.

As the kings proved themselves to govern in varying degrees of corruption, injustice, and unfaithfulness, massive empires swallowed the tiny kingdoms. As God's people looked out at their future from under the thumb of great foreign powers like Assyria, Persia, Greece, and eventually Rome, they lost any genuine vision of hope that they could become masters of their own destiny through any actions of their own. They began to seek God as the only One who could deliver them from their servility and foreign oppression.

The prophets became the voices of hope and faith in God who would make things right and bring God's people to their promised fulfillment as God's own Kingdom would be brought into existence.

The latest prophet in this line was Daniel. While his accounts are set in the courts of the Babylonian Empire, in fact Daniel was written during the Greek Hellenistic era only 150 years before Jesus. Yet some of the ideas presented, like God's bringing about a new heaven and a new earth, were evident in basic form in Second Isaiah, about 550 years before Jesus.

Today's selection from Daniel was discussed recently and may be familiar. We have a vision of Daniel with incredible descriptions, first of God, the Ancient of Days, dazzling white on a blazing throne with a river of fire surrounded by many thousands of attendants, and ruling before untold millions more. His vision includes the "Ancient of Days," describing a royal court with the true Sovereign God presiding. "The books" are opened, presumably a record of the activity of the four beasts – the mighty, awesome worldly empires and their grand, ferocious rulers. Daniel portrayed the fourth beast as the most terrifying and powerful. Yet it seems this ghastly fourth beast is slain and cast into the river of fire.

Then Daniel describes the "one like a son of man." Christians like to think this *was* Jesus. In fact, this is how Jesus titles himself in his cosmic form and implication. Still, we should not back-read something into the text that's not intended. Better to see that the tradition and expectation for one *like Jesus* preceded him.

Indeed, this Son of Man is heavenly, from the Kingdom of God. He is given the kind of heavenly power and authority that earthly rulers and empires can never possess. He bears complete sovereign power over everything in creation, and his realm is everlasting. He is obviously God's specially chosen regent over all the earth.

In this, listen for the crushing overthrow of the arrogant powers of the world who wrongly believe *they* have all authority and power, acting in any way they feel is to their advantage. Now, all the rules have changed and all the values are overturned. Something entirely new has taken over.

The worldly powers took the temporary authority granted by God and used it for their own benefit, disregarding God's will and the way of truth in the Kingdom. Daniel's vision shows how the true authority of God straightens it all out. It shows how empty and weak the mighty ones of the world are before the transcendent sovereignty of God and his Son of Man. No empire, no nation, and no ruler exists to suit its own purposes and ambitions. Each one stands and remains only insofar as it advances the will of God and reflects God's kingdom values. But the world and its powers do not see this or believe this. They cling to the belief that they are in control and can have all things their way. They have no consideration for the justice, righteousness, and peace of God's Kingdom.

In the gospel of John, we see the God's true King revealed again as Jesus comes before Pilate. Jesus understood himself to be both the Son of Man in cosmic revelation, and Suffering Servant in earthly ministry, but neither of these categories are the subject of his interrogation. This scene, too, is like a royal court, only here the players are the world's mighty authorities ... and a strange one who claims not to be a power of this world. Again, the striking contrast is made between how we regard and value things *in this world*, versus how things stand *in truth in the Kingdom of God*. Watch how the game is played and how the rules change.

Pilate has been going back and forth between Jesus and the Jewish leaders who arrested him. They have brought Jesus to Pilate because on the Romans have authority to conduct executions. Pilate doesn't know what to do with the demands being made by the Jewish leaders, or what to make of this strange man who's caused such a disturbance. What **is** all the fuss about, he wonders?

The Jewish leaders are making no clear charges against Jesus that Pilate can fathom. Since they want him executed, Jesus must pose quite a threat to their power and authority. So Pilate asks Jesus, "Are you the *king* of the Jews?" Jesus' reply could really be translated, 'Do you know what you're saying when you use that loaded expression?' Pilate admits he doesn't know what's so special about the title "king of the Jews." Pilate isn't interested either, he wants the simple facts, 'What did Jesus do that's brought on all of this?'

As is common in John's gospel, Jesus ignores the immediate question and replies to one that *should* have been asked. (This tactic certainly keeps the questioner off guard.) Our translation says Jesus talks about his *kingdom*. A better translation in context has him describing his "**kingship**." So he says, "My *Kingship* is **not** of this world." A worldly king would use force to defend his kingship, and his servants would fight violently for their king. But Jesus is no such king as events have already shown. Indeed, Jesus' kingship has nothing to do with the political posturing going on between the Jewish leaders and the Roman procurator Pilate. His Kingship transcends such petty foolishness, and stands alone, unrivalled and indifferent to their silly intrigues. They literally mean nothing to him.

‘Aha!’ says Pilate, ‘then you **are** a king!’ Jesus knows that Pilate still doesn’t get it. Pilate is still thinking in worldly terms and remains utterly clueless about the heavenly, transcendent nature of Jesus’ kingship authority as Son of Man.

So Jesus brings forward the subject of ‘truth’ and reveals himself as the witness to ‘the truth,’ and claims that those who know ‘the truth’ listen to him. Pilate is completely lost. Truth is not a subject that has any meaning for him. In his world – as in our world – truth comes in many different shades and shapes, so many forms and formulas, that it ends up a meaningless notion.

Of course, Pilate is still thinking in worldly terms. Indeed, there’s nothing in the world that can profess to bear the complete truth. But people who know the truth in God can see that truth in Jesus, and hear that truth in his words.

The irony of course is that, for Pilate, the truth is standing directly in front of him if only he would *seek* the truth. The King of truth, Regent of the Kingdom of God, confronts him, but Pilate walks away wrapped in the mantle of his worldly authority and beholden to its false truths.

To behold the truth ourselves, we must behold the King who ascends to his rightful place in the heavenly Kingdom, anointed Ruler of all creation, and having all authority, power and dominion given unto him.

We started off (long ago) talking about voting. While this is truly the hallmark of how a democracy chooses its leaders, and the preferred way for our world to work, it seems like some folks want to vote for the kind of Jesus that they prefer.

For instance, folks may like his promise of new life, but aren’t too thrilled with welcoming and embracing the outcast. They may like his ability to heal, but his obvious preference for the poor rubs the wrong way. They may like the terrific job he does in casting out demons, but cringe at the way he rejects authority, and dismisses the law-and-order types. By the time they’ve voted for the Jesus positions that agree with theirs, they don’t have Jesus any longer. Instead, they have an idol who agrees with them and never makes any real demands on them, while still promising to fulfill their desires and expectations.

No, Jesus is the Son of Man, the sovereign Lord of the Kingdom. He is a complete package meant to challenge and transform us into faithfulness to his way of acting and believing, and to his message of new life for all.

In this case, no, your vote doesn’t count and doesn’t matter. Jesus is Lord and Savior, King for the Kingdom of God. He is God’s presence in the world, bringing good news of his new way to live in the world, as heirs to his Kingdom. His way stands as the only way the world will know true peace, genuine justice, and realize the promise of life. May we seek his sacred way and find our blessing in him always.