

Election 2016
Dreams and Nightmares
November 13, 2016

PRELUDE – Whom Shall I Fear

Worship Song – Whom Shall I Fear

Transition – Naomi

Worship Song – Good, Good Father

Feature – “The Waiting”

Would you pray with me?

Jesus, you told us to pray “Thy Kingdom come;
Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven.”
And You told us that one day You would return
and make that prayer a reality in all of its
fullness.

We anxiously look forward to that day – a day
in which all strife and oppression will cease; a
day in which peace and prosperity and
goodness will be a reality for all; a day in which

Your presence will be manifest among us again.

But in the meantime, we wait.

And waiting is hard, for as we wait, the heaviness of the troubles in our world weighs upon us ... including the outcome of our recent election. Some of us feel like our dreams turned to dust on Tuesday night; others of us feel our patience being tested as we see the outpouring of opposition.

But Lord, you said that those of us who know you are to be different; we're not to be driven by the emotions of the moment. We are not to be controlled by these thoughts but we're to trust that You really are working "in all things (including our elections) for the good of those who love you and belong to you."

So, Lord Jesus, as we wait for the day when all is set right again, remind us that we're not alone; that You are the love that never lets us

go.

And help us as Your followers to be good citizens and representatives of *your* Kingdom *first*, before all others including even this wonderful country in which you have allowed us to live. For *Yours* is the true Kingdom and *Yours* is the true power and *Yours* is the true glory forever and ever!

Amen.

Cards on the Table

Good morning everyone.

“A dream come true for millions of Americans; a nightmare for millions of others.”

That’s how one commentator described the results of the most divisive Presidential Election season in modern history.

I don't know how you feel about what took place on Tuesday evening (actually, early Wednesday morning) when it became clear that Donald J. Trump would become the 45th President of the United States, but for me personally, *I'm about as torn as I can be about the result*. As I mentioned in my weekly email and in a post on the NHCC Facebook page, many times this week I have found myself weeping ... and I'm not a weeping kind of guy, so this is really strange.

I'll explain why I'm so torn but, before I do, you need to know that I have debated for three days on how to begin this message – as to whether or not I should lay my cards on the table up front – for fear that you will misunderstand me and turn me off.

But I think I have to. I think it's the right thing to do even though ...

- If you voted for Hillary Clinton, I'm probably gonna make you mad. But that's not my goal. And I hope you'll hear me out.
- If you voted for Donald Trump, I'm probably gonna make you mad, too. But that's not my goal. And I hope you'll hear me out.

So, four things you need to know.

1. Most of you have probably guessed that I am politically conservative though I have never once in 22 years as a pastor (or even as a private citizen) encouraged anyone else to vote like I do. I am not a political crusader.

And if you must know, I have voted for a Democratic Presidential candidate only once in my life – Jimmy Carter because he

was a born-again Christian. In addition, as I said many times in the months leading up to the election, I thought all three major candidates were *the worst* I had seen in my life. I was not voting *for* anyone.

2. I am an American and I love how our country was designed to work. I think our nation's founders (though they were flawed sinners just like everyone else) had a great deal of wisdom in how they set up our system of limited federal government.
3. I am a Christian. And I am convinced that Jesus is the way, the truth and the life and that the best way for all people everywhere to live is the way that He and His apostles taught, which is recorded in the writings of the New Testament.

When it comes to the moral and ethical

issues in their life, every person has to draw the lines somewhere; I believe that where God – as a good, good Father – has drawn them is the best (though I also fall short in honoring those lines).

4. I am a pastor. And I believe that the church – the multitudes of little communities of believers-in-Jesus all over the world who live and proclaim the Gospel – I believe that the church, regardless of what party or system of government is in power, is the hope of the world.

So, with all of that as background ...

- You will not be shocked to know that there is a part of me that is greatly relieved that Hillary Clinton is not our President. (That has nothing to do with the fact that she's a woman or whatever character issues she may have).

- Part of me is encouraged that, as a result of the election, there is now a widespread conservative influence at all levels of government. I think that their basic principles of government (not necessarily all of their policies and certainly not their person) best fits what the founders had in mind.
- And part of me hopes that this might be a move away from the growing anti-Christian bias in governmental systems.

Wednesday Weeping

I should be happy, right? So, why am I torn?
Why have I been in tears?

It didn't start out that way. Wednesday morning when I woke up, my first feeling was, as I said, a sense of relief and, quite frankly,

shock and admiration that Trump actually won. I mean, the guy was counted out at every turn for the past 18 months and he kept coming back. Pretty impressive.

But that relief was soon followed by another more sobering thought: “what does this communicate to the next generation – to the young people in our country, many of whom have been educated by institutions that are increasingly liberal and anti-American?”

Didn’t take very long to get an answer to that one. Check it out.

Video: Not My President (2.0 min)

And then, after thinking “what does this communicate to the next generation?” I thought, “What will this mean for how Christianity and the church are perceived – again, especially among young people, many of whom have been educated at institutions that

are more and more anti-Christian?”

To an increasing number of these young men and women, Christians are already considered to be haters and bigots and whatever else. And Trump’s victory only adds more “evidence” to the pile ... even though a great percentage of Christians who voted for Trump did have major, major reservations about him, but they felt they had no choice because they had *even greater* reservations about Hillary and the direction in which she would take the country. Uggh. What a terrible choice.

And as I pondered all of this, it hit me: *oh my goodness*. Could the cure – at least, what many conservatives came to think of as the cure: to stop Hillary with Trump – could the cure in the long run turn out to be more deadly than the disease?

And that was a really dark thought. So dark, in fact, that given the potential negative

association of Christianity with Trump and how it might limit the spread of the Gospel to the next generation – I’m *this close* to deciding that in the future, I’m not voting for any candidate so as not to put a stumbling block in front of anyone.

As the Apostle Paul once wrote to the Christians at Corinth:

*Be careful that the exercise of your rights does not become a stumbling block to the weak ... if what I eat causes my brother or sister to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause them to fall. 1
Corinthians 8:9,13 (NIV)*

Given the culture in which we live, that might actually apply to voting.

But that’s a discussion and a decision for the future. I’m only sharing that now so you can understand what I was feeling last Wednesday.

More pertinent to the present ... as I began to read and listen to the dialogue taking place on social media and the news channels, it was so demoralizing, and heart-wrenching. Oh, there are a lot of happy people over this election; but there are also a lot of *hurting* people over this election ... which, in my mind, leads to the question: How should conservatives – especially Christian conservatives – respond?

- Should they point out that it's hypocritical to not accept Trump's victory after castigating *him* when he said he wasn't sure he would accept the result if Hillary won?
- Should they shame the losers with, essentially, "Stop being a baby; suck it up and move on?"
- Should they sarcastically quote Barack

Obama who, in his first month as President in 2009, said “Elections have consequences – and, at the end of the day, I won?”ⁱ

A lot of people *are* responding in those ways.

Speaking of President Obama, I remember very clearly the night he was elected for the first time. I remember watching his victory speech in Chicago’s Grant Park.

Part of me was proud that our country had progressed far enough that an African-American could be elected President. “But why did it have to be *that one*?” I thought.

And I thought that because I was worried about some of the things he had said in his campaign as well as some of the known left-wing radicals he had associated with in his life. In fact, I was depressed after that election ...

... which is why, I think, the light came on for

me on Wednesday and I realized that I needed to talk about this today. *The way I felt eight years ago (right or wrong – I’m not saying my perceptions were correct) is the way that some of you feel today (and maybe even worse).*

And if you don’t feel that way personally, you know of people who do. Lots of them. Like, half of the U.S. population.

And as I thought about that throughout the day on Wednesday – no, actually, as I *felt* it and have continued to feel it – two scriptures came to my mind that I thought might be worth talking about; two scriptures that equally apply to *both* liberals and conservatives – and, quite frankly, even to people who didn’t vote for either Trump or Clinton.

Of course, as always, these scriptures are written for Christians and are not therefore binding on non-Christians, so if you’re not a Christian you don’t have to do what they say.

You're welcome to try it, but, really, this is not an expectation of how you should live your life. This is just what God tells followers of Jesus to do.

Ok, so here's the first scripture that came to me. It's from Paul's letter to the church at Rome.

*Rejoice with those who rejoice,
weep with those who weep.
Romans 12:15 (NLT)*

Would you mind reading that with me out loud? Here we go:

*Rejoice with those who rejoice,
weep with those who weep.
Romans 12:15 (NLT)*

That's the first scripture. Here's the second.

*Above all, love each other
deeply, because love covers
over a multitude of sins.
1 Peter 4:8 (NIV)*

I'm going to ask you to read it with me again out loud. Here we go:

*Above all, love each other
deeply, because love covers
over a multitude of sins.
1 Peter 4:8 (NIV)*

Great. Thank you.

Now, what do those verses have to do with processing this election?

Towards Empathy

Well, as I've thought about them over the past several days, a word keeps coming to my mind; something we all could do that might actually help things settle down a little bit.

See, right now as a nation, we're at the point where so much emotion is there and so much

pain is there from how the dialogue has proceeded that we can't even talk about issues any more. Now, *it's personal. It's about each other.*

It's a lot like what happens with a lot of couples that we counsel around here. They have an issue that needs to be addressed but the way they've talked to each other about it and how they've expressed their anger over it has caused so much hurt and pain that they can't get back to the original issue. So much wounding has taken place through the crazy cycle of insult and response that the original problem – *which so often is minor by comparison and could be solved* – just gets lost.

That's where we are as a nation. And the campaign season (in particular, Trump's tweeting and his verbal insults) didn't help.

The question is are we going to stay here and watch the divide get worse or are we going to

try and fix it? And if we are, how do we do that?

It would be arrogant of me to think that my one little word is going to have that kind of power but I do think it's a decent first step. In fact, it's already making a difference for me with some of the people that I love.

Ok, here's the word. It's ...

Empathy: try to understand *and feel* the world from “their” perspective.

And when I say “their” perspective, I mean the people with whom you disagree politically. If we're going to move forward, both sides have to empathize with each other.

And empathy is a two-step process. First, we attempt to intellectually comprehend someone else's circumstances. Then, second, we attempt to experience the emotions that those circumstances provoke in them. Empathy

means we try to feel *their* pain in *our* heart.

So, if you voted for Trump and you are happy he won (or Hillary lost), try to put yourself in the place of someone who voted for her and then ask yourself “why would that person be weeping?”

We heard the one young woman on the video we saw a few minutes ago say she was in tears. Why? “She was so close; she was right there; but he won.” As young woman she’s experiencing the loss of a dream of a woman becoming president.

I talked to one of my daughters yesterday and she said, “Dad, I looked at that ballot and, for the first time in my life, I saw a woman’s name in the president section and I just started crying right there.” That’s how big of a deal it was for her and a lot of other women. And after I listened to her, I said, “I hear your disappointment and I’m sad for you.”

I want to show you another example of why a lot of people are weeping: an interview with Jonathan Capehart, who is a writer for the Washington Post. As you watch, think about what the world looks like from his perspective.

And if you're a conservative, try not to mentally debate or evaluate what he is saying. Just listen and feel. Listen and feel. Empathize. Imagine what it's like to be in his shoes and to feel what he feels.

Here we go.

Video: If You've Never Faced Discrimination (3.5 min)

Now, how accurate is his assessment of the situation? How valid is his fear that everything he considers to be progress in the past eight years is going to disappear?

At this point, it doesn't matter because when you empathize with someone, you don't debate the validity of their feelings. People have a *right* to feel what they feel without being judged. "Oh you shouldn't feel that." Really? You don't apply that rule to yourself!

When you empathize, the goal is to feel what the other person feels *so that* ... hopefully ... eventually ... we can have a conversation that is civil and compassionate.

So, if you're a conservative, who do you know that's really upset about this election? Find out why and, as much as possible, weep with them. Empathize with them. I dare you.

Of course, this works both ways because not only are Christians to weep with those who weep, we're also to rejoice with those who rejoice.

So that means if you voted for Hillary, try to put yourself in the place of someone who voted against her (or for Trump) and then ask yourself (or them) “why would they be rejoicing right now?”

And the answer is not that they’re ignorant. Or they’re bigots. The answer is ... well, let’s watch.

Video: Fed Up With the Elite (2.0 min)

“Brexit comes to America. What the elites say, people ended up rejecting.”

There a whole bunch of people in this country who have heard for a lot of years that they’re “deplorables” and “irredeemable”; that they’re just inherently bitter folks who don’t know any better than to cling to their guns and religion.

- They’re offended by liberal elites who are teaching their children that the U.S. is bad,

the West is bad, capitalism is bad, whites are bad, and men are bad, and only other cultures, other colors, and other genders are good.

- They're tired of their values – the values on which they believe our country was built – being labeled as hate.
- They're weary of what they believe to be the dangerous foolishness of political correctness.
- They think a “tolerance” that accepts everything under the sun except for conservatives is hypocritical.
- They fear a system that values diversity but only diversity in race, religion, gender, sexual preference, and nationality but not diversity of opinion and thought.
- They believe that the greatest danger to

our democracy comes not from terrorists, but from the far left indoctrination of our colleges and universities.ⁱⁱ

Now, how accurate is that assessment of the situation?

It doesn't matter – at least, not at this point. The question is “what is it like to see the world from that perspective and to *feel* that way?”

And if you can get some sense of that – if you can empathize – you can understand why people are rejoicing at the outcome of the election. And if you can do that ... hopefully ... eventually ... you can have a conversation that is civil and compassionate.

So, if you're a liberal, who do you know that's happy about this election? Find out why and, as much as possible, rejoice with them. Empathize with them. I dare you.

The Payoff of Empathy

Now, I know at this point some of you are thinking, “Rick, this is just stupid. You’re asking us to close our eyes and coddle a bunch of whiners.” Or, “Rick, you’re asking us to close our eyes and condone ignorance.”

No, I’m not. I’m saying *start* with empathy.

That’s what’s missing in this culture. That’s why there is so little constructive dialogue. The only way forward, at least as a first step, is to *weep with those who weep and rejoice with those who rejoice ...* because when we do that, an amazing thing happens.

When you empathize with “them” an amazing transformation takes place. “They” stop being “them” and they become just people again. When we empathize, we humanize instead of horribilize.

In the middle of all the sludge of the election season, there was a great illustration of how empathy really does produce this result. Maybe you saw it. It was a commercial that was put together by Pedigree dog food.

Check it out.

Video: A Vote for Good (2.5 min)

<BEGIN SLIDE SET 2>

Not only did that make me cry, it also made me glad that we feed our dog Pedigree!

When we empathize, we humanize.

And when people become humans to us again, we can love them.

And when we love them, love covers a multitude of sins ... including being a liberal or a conservative.

*Above all, love each other
deeply, because love covers
over a multitude of sins.*

1 Peter 4:8 (NIV)

Blessing Pronounced

It's my hope and prayer that maybe we can start empathizing with one another. And again, I challenge you especially if you are Christian to try to understand *and feel* the world from the perspective of the other side.

Of course, having said that, one of the things we believe very strongly here at NHCC is that you can only give to someone else what you have already received from God. Specifically, in this case, you cannot be empathetic with others if you don't have a sense of God being empathetic towards you; that somehow, someday, He has been in your place and He knows what it's like to be you and to feel what you feel.

The life of Jesus is evidence that He does know that. And he does feel that. And so, He loves you, He cares about you, you matter to Him.

And, in the end, whether you're liberal or conservative, that's really what it comes down to – at least, if you're a Christian. What matters more than “who is President” is “who is God?” which is why the writer of the 146th Psalm advises us:

*Do not put your trust in
princes, in human beings, who
cannot save. When their spirit
departs, they return to the
ground; on that very day their
plans come to nothing.*

Instead ...

*Blessed are those whose help is
the God of Jacob, whose hope is
in the Lord their God. He is the*

*Maker of heaven and earth, the
sea, and everything in them—
he remains faithful forever.*

*He upholds the cause of the
oppressed and gives food to
the hungry.*

*The Lord sets prisoners free;
The Lord gives sight to the
blind;*

*The Lord lifts up those who are
bowed down*

The Lord loves the righteous.

*The Lord watches over the
foreigner and sustains the
fatherless and the widow (but
he frustrates the ways of the
wicked).*

*The Lord reigns forever, your
God, O Zion, for all generations!*

Psalms 146:3-10 (NIV)

See, in the end, at least for Christians whether we're politically liberal or conservative, it comes down to the Lord and His work in our lives and in our world.

And the Lord knows that sometimes we just need to have people tell us that and remind us of it.

In fact, just after delivering the people of Israel from captivity in Egypt, God spoke to Moses and told him that every so often, the leaders of the nation were to call the people of Israel together and speak a word of blessing over them.

The Lord said to Moses, "Tell Aaron and his sons to bless the people of Israel with this special blessing:

Here's the blessing:

The Lord bless you, and keep you;

The Lord make His face to shine upon you and be gracious to you;

The Lord lift up His countenance on you and give

you peace.

Numbers 6:24-26 (NASB)

So we've adopted the same tradition here at NHCC. Every so often, our pastors feel compelled to speak a word of blessing – this blessing – over everyone who is willing to receive it.

And that's what we're going to do in just a few minutes (and if you are part of my "blessors," would you please get in place like we do at our communion stations?)

Here's what's going to happen. In just a few minutes when the music starts, I want you to get up out of your seat and come to one of the people at a station. And what they're going to do is to simply say the words of blessing that God told Moses and Aaron to say over the people of Israel.

They're not going to try to counsel you or pray

over you. There's not going to be anything weird or strange. We won't do anything that embarrasses you. So, please don't be nervous. Be bold, and let God bless you through these words.

And then after that, go back and have a seat because there's one more very important thing we need to do this morning before we leave.

Ok, here we go.

Spoken Blessing

Brief prayer

Celebration of Christmas Promo – Rick & Shannon

Walkout Song – Rockin' Around the Christmas Tree

Endnotes

ⁱ <http://www.onenewsnow.com/perspectives/sandy-rios/2016/11/10/elections-have-consequences-amen>

ⁱⁱ See https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2016/11/09/trump-won-because-college-educated-americans-are-out-of-touch/?tid=pm_opinions_pop#comments