



WESTMINSTER
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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But Can God Trust in Us?

Dr. Bruce Lancaster

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Psalm 33
1 Peter 2:1-10

This Wednesday, November 11, bells will be rung across our nation to honor our veterans, tolling the bell twenty-one times for Veterans Day.

This national holiday was originally called Armistice Day to remember the end of World War I, a day of peace.

The name was changed to Veterans Day in 1954 to honor those who had served in World War II and the Korean conflict and all military veterans.

It was at the 11th hour on the 11th day of the 11th month of 1918, the cease-fire with Germany went into effect to end what at the time was called the “War to End All Wars.”

Some scholars believe this psalm was written at such a time in the history of Israel.

It is possible that some invader, relying on horses which Israel did not have, with warriors and armies which seemed invincible, had been defeated and the people of Israel were delivered into victory.

As verses sixteen and seventeen proclaim, *“A king is not saved by his great army; a warrior is not delivered by his great strength. The war horse is a vain hope for victory, and by its great might it cannot save.”*

And victorious nations began to claim that 12th verse, “*Happy is the nation whose God is the Lord...*”

On paper it sounds so good for us as we claim God for our nation.

As it says in the preamble to the Declaration of Independence, “...endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness”; and in the Pledge of Allegiance to the flag, “one nation under God.”

We have it on every coin, maybe you have it on your license plate: “In God We Trust.”

But you see, what the psalmist does, what Peter does, is remind us that even as we put forth a claim on God for us as a nation, God has the original claim on you and me as God’s people.

Note the beginning of Peter’s letter. He writes “*to the exiles of the dispersion...*” who have left Jerusalem; it’s not about the nation in which they live, but to those “*who have been chosen...by God...*” wherever they live.

That’s the flip side of the coin, God’s claim on you and me. So, have you ever thought about it this way, “Can God Trust in Us?”

What if that motto were on our coins, our money, so that whenever we spend our money it would remind us of God’s claim on our lives?

Some say that in our pursuit of life, liberty and happiness we have actually forgotten God's name; what one theologian calls 'practical atheism'.

He says that "having lost a sense of transcendence (that is, a relationship with God) in our common life, we look for meaning in power, achievement, and success."

That is, we find meaning in our money; we put our trust in our money and what it can buy, how it supports our lifestyles, our privilege, our politics, our prejudices, our pleasures.

The psalmist, even following a great victory for his nation, will not allow us to wrap ourselves in any of those kinds of flags and lose that relationship with God.

What this psalm does is to wrap us with the greatness and goodness of God and calls us to know God, to praise God, to worship God as the God sovereign overall all the nations, *"all the inhabitants of the world to stand in awe of him."*

And the New Testament is very clear that it's not so much about nations as a political power or a certain form of government, but our power as God's people whether we live in the United States or Peru or Zimbabwe.

Look again at what the psalm says.

First of all, there is the matter of our identity: Not as a matter of the nation in which we live, but the fact that wherever we live, we are God's people. There is, of course, our responsibilities as citizens, but we are first called to loyalty to God.

Our ultimate allegiance is to the God who knows no national boundaries or political preferences. Our God is God of all nations, all people!

But on the other hand, we have to deal with the political reality of our land, and votes were cast this past week for the ones we think represent our personal view of what is the right thing to do.

So, what is our church, what are we Christians to do in this post-election world?

First, we keep on doing what we were doing before the election: We worship and glorify God, we follow Jesus Christ as we live his mission in day after day, and we care for one another and those in our community who need us.

As important as elections are that set a course for the direction our country and our communities, they pale in importance to the call of the church to gather to worship the God of all nations and all ages.

God is still God, and the promises of God are eternal. The mission of God through Jesus Christ continues to shape our lives and provide the foundation for our future.

The election did not alter that for us. We are going to fulfill our mission as disciples of Jesus Christ in this community of faith we call Westminster Presbyterian Church just as other congregations will do in their communities.

There is no need for despair if your party lost because God's promises are not deterred by popular votes or an electoral college. And if your party won, don't make the mistake of thinking the kingdom of God has been inaugurated with your candidate.

We're all aware that these bewildering times call for prayerful and wise discernment. In so doing, we are going to model for our community and world how the body of Christ lives in the world but is not conformed to the world.

It's easy, I know, to draw the line in such a way as to put ourselves on the side of the good and others on the side of evil.

Jesus warned us plainly, though, about not making the mistake of pointing out the speck in our brother's eye while having a log in our own.

The fact is that people of goodwill have differing ideas about how to create conditions of 'life and liberty and happiness' for people who are trapped in poverty, caught in unemployment or underemployment, and lack adequate healthcare.

We need to continue to strive to fulfill those words of our Declaration of Independence, that "all men (people) are created equal, ...endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."

But just having these words in a document or having them on a license plate doesn't make them so.

We must live them to make them so. God calls the church to become a unique moral community that displays as best it can God's character and love.

The Scriptures are clear about qualities like moral purity, faithfulness, honesty, kindness, care, generosity, hospitality, humility, justice and peacemaking that set Christians apart as 'different' as Peter proclaims: *Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.*"

In this land so divided, maybe we need that armistice again. Just as the guns fell silent so many years ago, allowing people to hear the sounds of hope and promise again, God puts his trust in us, to remember that true peace comes not from victory on the battlefield but through justice and abundant life for all people of the world.

Can God trust us to do that?

Can God trust us for principled people of both parties to use their power for the sake of the powerless rather than simply retaining power?

Can God trust us for a renewed commitment to candor and compassion, cooperation, and truth-telling?

We have to be able to trust that we and our leaders are facing facts, dealing with reality, and leveling with us. We are too accustomed to and too tolerant of hype and spin, misdirection and hiding the truth.

But Can God Trust in Us?

The Scriptures tell us God will heal our land, but it isn't by elections, as important as they are. It will be when God's people learn to live their faith as those before us have taught us to love one another as Christ has loved us.

I think the words of the Franciscan Benediction say it well:

May God bless us with discomfort at easy answers, half-truths, and superficial relationships, so that we may live deep within our hearts.

May God bless us with anger at injustice, oppression, and exploitation of people, so that we may work for justice, freedom, and peace.

May God bless us with tears to shed for those who suffer from pain, rejection, hunger, and war, so that we may reach out our hands to comfort them and turn their pain into joy.

And may God bless us with enough foolishness to believe that we can make a difference in this world, so that we can do what others claim cannot be done, to bring justice and kindness to all our children and the poor.

You are the ones chosen by God, trusted for the high calling to do God's work as you live what God has done for the world in Jesus Christ.

TO GOD BE THE GLORY.



WESTMINSTER
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

2040 Washington Road
Pittsburgh, PA 15241
412-835-6630

www.westminster-church.org