

October 25, 2020 – Pentecost 21 (A)
Our Family – A Reflection

As the U.S. approaches Election Day, November 3rd, Sermons That Work is teaming up with The Episcopal Church's Office of Government Relations and four writers from across the Church to reflect on the Christian call to participate in our common life together through voting.

There aren't many days left before people in our nation head to the polls. Very soon we will be casting ballots in one of the most important elections in our lifetimes. What principles and loyalties will we carry into the voting booth? Over the past few months of this lengthy election season, I've heard fellow Americans speak about how they are going to vote for what is best for their family. I suspect that our family's wellbeing will always be one of the most pressing concerns for us all. And yet as people of faith, it is also worth considering who Jesus asked us to consider "family."

In Matthew 22, Jesus is asked by a scholar of the Torah which law was the greatest. I imagine this lawyer had wrestled with this question for a long time, perhaps while making many challenging decisions. "What is most essential?" he asks. Jesus' response is as well-known as it is unpracticed. "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind" and "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

Although Jesus' words are likely very familiar to us, what do they really mean? In response to the lawyer, Jesus is saying that love of God requires us to be as loyal to the wellbeing of our neighbors as we are to that of our own family. First and foremost, this requires us to go and vote. Beyond this, however, it means we have to consider not just what will be beneficial to ourselves but what is going to help to build a better world for those well beyond our immediate circle.

In my own case, this teaching requires me to consider not only the health and healthcare of those who live in my home; it also means being concerned about the health of the people I pass on the street, especially during this COVID-19 pandemic. Jesus' words insist I consider not only what will strengthen my own family's wealth portfolio, but to also consider the economic wellbeing of families struggling to make ends meet, particularly as millions have now become unemployed. "Love of neighbor" requires me to not only think of the smiling children in my picture frames, but also of kids doing their homework in homeless shelters, of refugee children fleeing from violence, and of the millions of Black and Latino kids who simply want room to run, play, live and breathe more freely.

Finally, Jesus' words require us to not only consider this generation but to develop a profound sense of loyalty to the generations yet to come, asking ourselves what sort of Earth we want to leave behind after we have breathed our last breath.

Come November, I expect that many of us will be voting with the wellbeing of our families in mind, and as Christians, Jesus calls us into the difficult but ultimately joyful work of expanding the circle - wider and wider - of just who we consider to be our family.

This reflection was written by Miguel Escobar, who is the executive director of Episcopal Divinity School at Union and serves on the boards of Forward Movement (chair) and Episcopal Relief & Development. Find more resources for election engagement at iam.ec/orgcivicengagement.

