A Letter from Shelley Bryan Wee, Bishop of the Northwest Washington Synod of the ELCA, to You

Dear Beloveds,

As the election season is here, I have been doing some reflecting on what it means to vote as a Lutheran Christian.

Please know that I am not telling you who to vote for in this election. It is not for me to tell you who to vote for. I mean, after all, God is neither Republican or Democrat, or even American.

But in saying that, I am not abdicating the responsibility that we have as Lutheran Christians who live in a country where voting matters. As children of God, we are called to vote beyond our own self-interest or individuality. As people who follow Jesus, we are called towards God's vision of a just and mercy-filled world. As people who have received grace upon grace, we are called to stand against injustice, and to remind everyone that, in God's eyes, every single person is loved and beloved.

So, here are a few thoughts and questions:

1. Jesus is all about loving one's neighbor. Even when it's hard. When he's asked, "Who is my neighbor," Jesus expands his answer. In Jesus' stories and actions he constantly goes to those who are on the outside, those marginalized, those without status, and shows how they are loved by God – how they are, in fact, his neighbor.
As you vote: Who is your neighbor?

2. Throughout scripture, hospitality to the stranger is embraced. In the Old Testament, the command to welcome strangers is repeated 37 times. In Matthew, Jesus says, "I was a stranger and you welcomed me."
As you vote: Who is the stranger?

3. God's will and God's calling is towards equity and justice for those who have been silenced, oppressed, or harmed. As we hear in Isaiah, "Learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, and plead for the widow."
As you vote: Who are the silenced, the oppressed, the harmed?

4. The eighth commandment declares that we are called to not bear false witness against our neighbor. This, of course, means not lying about another but seeking the truth. This means no name-calling or false accusations. But it goes beyond this. As Martin Luther tells us in his Small Catechism, we are to defend our neighbor, speak well of our neighbor, and explain everything in the kindest way.
As you vote: Who is speaking truth?

5. God created this beautiful earth and declared that we are both part of the creation and are also called to be stewards of it. As we read in the ELCA social statement called "Caring for Creation: Vision, Hope, and Justice," we affirm that it is God's intention for us to join in the healing and wholeness of creation.
As you vote: Who is caring for creation?

Dear Beloveds of God, there is so much more that could be written about the state of our country and what voting means. We could make this all complicated and intricate and difficult. But truly, it comes down to this: God's love is unconditional and unending. Jesus came to this earth to show, to embody, to be God's love for us and for all people. And so, knowing this, trusting this, believing this, we are called. We are called, as children of God, to show this love to the world. We are called to vote against hate. We are called to vote for God's love. As we hear in 1 John, "There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear … We love because God first loved us."

+Bishop Shelley Bryan Wee

St. Mark's Lutheran Church by the Narrows
Core Commitments for Peace and Justice

Care for the Vulnerable
The scriptures call our attention to the most vulnerable among us. Today: migrants, immigrants and refugees.
Deuteronomy 10.19; Matthew 25.40

Care for the Hungry
The scriptures call us to attend to our neighbors in their most basic needs.
Exodus 16.17-18; Mark 6.37-38

Care for Those on the Margins
The scriptures call us to stand with those marginalized and at risk. Today: those without homes, the LGBTQIA+ community, people of color, and immigrants.
Isaiah 56.8; Mark 1.40-41

Care for the Oppressed
The scriptures call us to name the structures of oppression, and to free those who are oppressed.
Exodus 3.7, 10; Mark 10.42-45

Care for Creation
The scriptures call us into healthy partnership with the creation, that we and the creation might nurture one another in wholeness.
Genesis 2.15; Matthew 6.26-30