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The Sunday After the Tuesday: The 2016 Presidential Election in the Pulpit

Matthew Boedy

Many political observers and even Donald Trump surrogates described the election of Trump on November 8, 2016 as a miracle. He won by a tremendous Electoral College advantage but lost the national popular vote by nearly the exact percentages polls predicted, or about 3 million votes. Election night swung emotionally and rather swiftly on television news broadcasts, from one clear prediction to one not seen by anyone. The campaign included more than the usual vitriol, promises to jail one's opponent, and not a few debates that bordered on the surreal. The days after the election were filled with protests in the streets in several cities, not a little rhetoric about the nadir of democracy, and of course, a few tweets by the then-president-elect furthering the division he fostered during the campaign.

This describes well the *kairos* of the Sunday after the Tuesday, when ministers of all stripes of Christianity stood before their congregations and spoke.¹ *Kairos* is a fundamental element in rhetorical theory, and specifically important to the study of hermeneutics as practiced in sermons. Many see *kairos* as simply the occasion to speak—the most appropriate time or “opportunity for rhetorical response.”² But when one describes the *kairos* of a sermon, one is describing the confluence of constraints, audience, genre, and the speaker's role that defines the “moment” the sermon speaks into. One of the best-known sermon-givers, Martin Luther King Jr., saw *kairos* as “more than the ‘right time’ to exert rhetorical action.” Instead *kairos* was “a means by which one effectively stops and reframes conventional time, altering its trajectories and possibilities.”³ Here we see the importance of the minister in naming (or re-naming) the opportunity before the church. He or she does not merely respond to a moment, but creates one through words.

How did ministers frame the election, if at all? I analyzed transcripts of 47 sermons from across the country (14 states plus Washington, D.C.), from multiple denominations and various sized congregations, given on November 13 or thereabouts. The sermons were chosen based on several factors. First, I looked at sermons of those named by the Trump campaign as evangelical advisors⁴ or those named in news accounts as supporters of either candidate. Second, I looked at churches located in politically significant states. As in all elections in the modern era, there were a handful of “swing states” in the 2016 election: Florida, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin (Trump won them all). I looked at churches in counties in each of these states where Trump and Clinton had the biggest total percentage of votes. Third, in each state that gave the biggest total to each candidate (Wyoming for Trump and Hawaii for Clinton), I looked at churches in the counties with the biggest total. In other words, the strongest part of the strongest state for

¹ The phrase “The Sunday after Tuesday” was actually the sermon title given on November 13 by the minister at Wesley Memorial United Methodist Church in Chattanooga, TN. See <https://vitalpiety.wordpress.com/2017/08/31/the-sunday-after-tuesday/>.

² Richard Crosby, “Kairos as God's Time in Martin Luther King Jr.'s Last Sunday Sermon,” *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 39 (2009): 260-280.

³ *Ibid.*, 261.

⁴ “Trump Campaign Announces Evangelical Advisory Board,” accessed April 20, 2017, <https://www.donaldjtrump.com/press-releases/trump-campaign-announces-evangelical-executive-advisory-board>.

each candidate. Fourth, I looked at churches in my home county, Hall County, Georgia.⁵ Trump won Hall County with 73.7 percent of the vote. It was not the county with the biggest victory for him in the state, but it is interesting for several reasons: 1) it is home to the current governor and lieutenant governor, both Christians and Republicans, and a member of Trump's campaign evangelical advisory board; 2) it is home to a rising Hispanic population; and 3) it is 80 percent white. With a 78.5 percent turnout for the 2016 election, that makes a particularly "red" county. Its median household income was about \$10,000 less than the national average of \$56,000. Twelve percent live below the poverty line. Along with about 22 percent having a bachelor's degree, this county represents national Trump voters well.

Lastly, I included sermons from November 13 and November 6 posted on SermonCentral.com, a website that claims to be "the world's leader in sermon resources and research." There ministers can post the text of their sermons and the database is searchable by date, topic, and scripture reference.⁶ These choices and other needs certainly limited the types of churches I gathered from. One obvious need beyond the handful of sermons found on Sermon Central was the church had to have a website and also post their sermons online, in audio, video, or complete text form. This limited my research because some counties that were home to the biggest victories did not have a church that had such online sermons. In those cases, I moved to the county with the second biggest victory. I think this did not skew the results that much as the churches without online presences, though typically smaller, often are theologically aligned with bigger ones with online presences.

My sample is broad geographically and theologically, though there were no selection criteria for individual denominations. There are certainly many denominations in this study, but because of the proliferation of non-denominational churches and the many studies on specific denominations concerning politics, I did not attempt to find a church from any particular denomination. This method produced a broad sample politically. I do not know, of course, how these ministers or their congregants voted, but many sermon-givers indirectly and directly identified strong political leanings or division in their churches. My sample is therefore representative of the vote record for the 2016 presidential election. The limitations, though, meant I did not study an especially important bloc of voters in 2016: those Obama supporters who switched to Trump, mainly in the northeast states known before the election as the "blue wall." But two of those states—Wisconsin and Pennsylvania—were "swing states," so there is a strong possibility that some of that bloc is represented in my study.

Despite these limitations, the quantity and variety of sources do provide a set of themes. First, only two sermons took a positive view of Donald Trump.⁷ One indirectly apologized to groups he had insulted or disparaged in his campaign. And while the large majority of the sermons did mention the election,⁸ none took a positive view of the campaign in general, noting its divisive tone. A handful of preachers—all from churches in the liberal wing of Christianity—used the Sunday to share emotions from the campaign and its outcome, mainly grief, sadness, and fear, particularly in minority communities. Overall, though, the message in relation to the election, and politics in general, from the overwhelming majority of sermons was the dual citizenship of

⁵ Trump won Georgia by a comfortable but surprising 5.7 percent. All election results came from Politico.

⁶ To get transcripts of some sermons only available through audio or video I used the "voice typing" function on Google Docs. This method does not guarantee exact word-for-word transcriptions, but any quotes in my article have been verified by the sermon posted online by the church.

⁷ One endorsed him and one thanked God for our "pro-life president."

⁸ My study showed that 18 of 47 sermons, or 38.3 percent, did not mention the election in any fashion. That means that 29 or 61.7 percent did.

Christians, both in heaven and on earth, and that the first took precedence. In that frame, the majority of sermons used the election to talk about how Christians could live out their primary citizenship in a place where they also had some responsibility and important relationships. This action was grounded in a faith in God's sovereign control over the results of the election and the world, in general. This prompted calls for unity among Christians.

This last theme also revealed a complexity: the relationship between politics and the self. Or in more specific terms, how does the minister view political action: as an individual effort or communal? This is a false binary. Voting is certainly praised in these sermons, even demanded as part of the Christian life. At the same time, some sermons saw political action as more than an act of voting, however important that *individual* act is. Those communal acts include opposing abortion and immigration, and supporting generic actions regarding "freedom." One can't make a clean cut of this divide, putting conservative branches of Christianity on one side and liberal branches on another. In general, ministers from both sides of this divide described political action as limited to voting—an individual inside a booth, marking a secret ballot. For example, Pastor Jim Garlow, one of Trump's strongest supporters, called voting a "Christian responsibility," but limited his political sermon to that interest.⁹ In the same way, a liberal Presbyterian pastor just outside Madison, Wisconsin described in great detail the spiritual thinking inside his heart as he stood over his ballot.¹⁰ The ministers told their congregants that the "mission" of the church would continue no matter who won, though that missional stance was primarily framed in what individuals can do.

Overall, the sermons reflected "historical trends stemming from early colonial days" and some used "covenant ideology and jeremiads... to respond to national crises in a way that calls for renewed religious vigor."¹¹ This vigor can be seen in political activities. But one should note that many of the sermons I studied were given *after* the election. The preachers wanted their congregants not to think their duty as Christians had passed even if their duty as citizens had been completed on that Tuesday. The preachers reframed the end as a beginning, as a renewal no matter who their listeners voted for. Given that Trump won, those who voted for him were perhaps already eager to show this vigor. But speaking to those who didn't vote for him, the preachers rhetorically framed the election as less important on its own but a part of another day living out the Christian life, a renewal of their spirituality.

The Role of Sermons/Clergy in Responding to Major Events

In many ways this divide between politics and spirituality reflects a paradox noticed by Miriam Yvonne Perkins, now Associate Professor of Theology and Society at Milligan College in Tennessee, in her study of evangelical sermons after September 11.¹² She writes that those sermons illustrate "the tension in evangelical communities between a fundamentalist pull toward separation from culture and the neo-evangelical desire for cultural engagement..."¹³ The tension was clear in the sermons that addressed the election.

⁹ Garlow, Jim. "Election 2016," accessed Nov. 14, 2017, <https://vimeo.com/190484470>.

¹⁰ Kevin Morledge, "Casting Your Kingdom Vote," accessed Nov. 15, 2017, <https://player.fm/series/first-presbyterian-church-waunakee/casting-your-kingdom-vote>.

¹¹ Miriam Yvonne Perkins, "Preaching and Rhetorical Responses to Terror: American Evangelical Sermons Delivered in Reaction to September 11, 2001" (PhD diss., Catholic University of America, 2008), 242.

¹² *Ibid.*, 241.

¹³ *Ibid.*

The tension is brought to a head when ministers are called on—or feel a call—to respond to major events in American life.¹⁴ In this frame, was the election on par with other major national events to which ministers have responded from the pulpit? Perkins notes that all but one of the sermons “began with a description of what had happened on September 11 and proceeded to comment primarily on this event.” This fact already separates it from the election of 2016. There are of course several other differences between the September 11 attacks and the 2016 election. September 11 was an event not foreseen, an abrupt challenge to the American psyche; the election of 2016 came after a long, contentious campaign. Second, September 11 involved the death of thousands, whereas obviously the election did not. Third, the effect of the September 11 attacks was a surge in patriotism, national unity, and a sense of community, whereas many articles were written about how the 2016 election divided families, workplaces, and churches. Fourth, the raw emotions associated with September 11 burst through that morning and lingered well into the following Sunday. Many expected their ministers to address those emotions as they sat in their pews; many newcomers came to church seeking solace. On the other hand, the raw feelings of the election had been simmering for some time and some ministers had already addressed them and the election before November 13.¹⁵

One church that did not mention the election on November 13 dedicated a four-part series to it in September and October. Collide Church in Yadkinville, NC titled that series “Election Infection.”¹⁶ In its description the church suggests the sermons would “wade through the messiness of the modern political system”—the campaigns’ “desperate” attempts for votes and “overwhelming, even nauseating... advertisements, empty promises, and aggressive debates.” The description claims the sermon would help the church “discover what God says on the subject.” In short, the series aimed for its hearers to “avoid contracting a case of the dreaded election infection!” It is an interesting metaphor, beyond the easy rhyme it creates. To see the election as an outside influence—in this case, a negative one—is consistent with many sermons in this study that saw politics as external to the church. Comparisons with other presidential elections notwithstanding, the metaphor also suggests that the church had porous boundaries, that it was susceptible to such an infection this year. And, of course, the implication is that “the gospel” or good theology could inoculate the sick.

In that frame, the 2016 election was a major event in the life of this congregation, enough to merit its inclusion in not just one sermon, but four. Because of the nature of sermons in Christian church services, that elevates the election significantly. The sermon is an important moment in any church service.¹⁷ Bryan Chapell, pastor of Grace Presbyterian Church in Peoria, Illinois, and on

¹⁴ See, for example, Stephen Albert Hamilton Wright, “Preaching about War: A Constructive Analysis of Sermons about the Persian Gulf War of 1991” (PhD diss., Vanderbilt University, 2000).

¹⁵ This is why I looked at a handful of sermons before the election. Of the 47 sermons I studied, 40 were given on November 13, 6 on November 6, and 1 on October 23. I specifically looked before November 13 for sermons by those ministers on Trump’s evangelical advisory board to see if they mentioned the election. I found two given on November 6 that addressed the election. Of the other four in my study given on November 6, two were found using date searches on Sermon Central and the other two were sermons specifically labeled on the church website as addressing the election. Both were in battleground states. In looking through churches in my home county, I also discovered a sermon dedicated to the election given on October 23.

¹⁶ “Election Infection,” Collide Church, accessed April 20, 2017, <http://www.collidechurch.com/election-infection>.

¹⁷ Of course, it is named differently and so treated in different ways. While a homily is “a practical discourse with a view to the spiritual edification of the hearers, rather than for the development of a doctrine or theme” (OED), a sermon is more dedicated to the latter. Catholics and “mainstream” denominations like Methodists and Presbyterians (U.S.A.) tend to offer homilies, while more conservative Protestant ministers sermonize. Many of the growing number of non-denominational, broadly evangelical churches in this study call the minister’s speaking “messages.”

the faculty of two seminaries, notes in his guide to expository preaching that a sermon is not done “merely to impart information but to provide the means of transformation ordained by a sovereign God that will affect the lives and destinies of eternal souls committed to a preacher’s care.”¹⁸ Preaching here is elevated to what Chapell calls “a royal pedestal.”¹⁹ What goals does a minister have for a sermon or commentary that addresses a national event? Perkins concludes that the central claim of “nearly all” the sermons responding to September 11 “was to make the national experience of terrorism an impetus for strengthening evangelical commitments and conversions.”²⁰ The sermons that mentioned the election in my study overwhelmingly assumed a divided nation and church. In response, many of these sermons generally aimed to rally congregants to a unity above politics. As the North Carolina church above exemplified, many sermons talked about how to love others amid division.

The Role of Christianity and its Clergy in Politics

Such a topic as sermons and the election brings up broader questions that have been studied by others *ad nauseam*: the relationship between church and state, the relationship between religion and politics, and, more specifically, the relationship between ministers and politics. These issues showed up in my study in the topic of the dual citizenship of Christians. Believers are “foreigners and exiles” and “strangers on this earth” in the New Testament, full citizens of heaven.²¹ Yet for a season, they are called to live on earth, as full citizens of earth. Brian Bill, pastor of Edgewood Baptist Church in Rock Island, IL, exemplified this approach when he centered his November 6 sermon on biblical lessons to help his church “engage as citizens” and so live out their “dual citizenship.”²² He suggested “Christians should be the best citizens,” in the manner of being “nice to each other” and “kind toward those who have a different political perspective.” Primarily he concluded that the Christian church has “always done better when in the minority” and this is why “our primary posture [toward the world] is not political but rather missional.” It is not clear but he could have been referring to the “church” before Constantine’s takeover of the Roman Empire, when the church was persecuted, though it is also likely he was referring to the American church. Many Christians in the theologically conservative, evangelical branch of the faith²³ believe the “true church” in America is a minority because of its “outsider” status to politics, a status Bill argued multiple times in his sermon through the term “missional.” This claim is challenged, though, by the 81 percent of evangelicals who voted for Trump,²⁴ the winner of the election.

According to Greg Brown, pastor and author of the *Bible Teachers’ Guide*, “the priorities of an earthly citizen are earthly, concerned with only the temporary things of this world, but the priorities of a heavenly citizen should be heavenly, concerned primarily with things of eternal

¹⁸ Brian Chapell, “Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon” (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2005), 25.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Perkins, 220.

²¹ 1 Peter 2:11 and Hebrews 11:13. All scripture quotations are from the NIV.

²² Brian Bill, “Engage as Citizens,” accessed Nov. 14, 2017, <https://www.sermoncentral.com/sermons/engage-as-citizens-brian-bill-sermon-on-politics-204991?page=9>.

²³ Here that label is best seen by Bill’s seminary alma mater: Trinity Evangelical Divinity School.

²⁴ For that figure, see Gregory A. Smith and Jessica Martinez, “How the Faithful Voted: A Preliminary 2016 Analysis,” Pew Research Center, accessed July 10, 2017, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/11/09/how-the-faithful-voted-a-preliminary-2016-analysis>.

value.”²⁵ While this clear statement is repeated in some form by many sermons in this study, its application—or the naming of the “things” in each realm—often varies. For example, voting is often *but not exclusively* considered to be an “earthly” action. Richard Land, president of Southern Evangelical Seminary and former president of the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC), the public policy arm of the Southern Baptist Convention, a denomination which some of the churches I studied are also a part of, argues that when Christians “bring our religious and moral convictions into the public marketplace of ideas and involve ourselves in the political arena, we are standing solidly within the best of our traditions as Americans and as Baptists.” Land also writes that “false understandings and misleading applications of church-state separation and religious liberty” have driven Christians “from the arena of debate.”²⁶

Land would be of the camp who believe Christians have come back into this arena in recent years and done so at the push of politically active ministers. The political role of clergy is a perennial subject for those who study religion in the United States. There are several studies on the involvement of clergy in the electoral process from the 1700s to the 2000s.²⁷ I want to pay particular attention to the 2000 election for comparison purposes. A study looked at the political activities of pastors in that election cycle from six mainline Protestant denominations, several of which are in my study: American Baptist, Reformed Church in America, Presbyterian Church U.S.A., Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, the United Methodist Church, and the Disciples of Christ.²⁸ It assessed 26 acts ranging from pulpit pronouncements to several kinds of campaigning.²⁹ It found a diverse set of political activities from a wide-ranging group of ministers, though 20 percent did not act politically at all. Another study looked at the political activities of evangelical ministers from five evangelical denominations in the 2000 election, several of which also show up in my study: the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA), the Christian Reformed Church (CRC), the Church of the Nazarene, and the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod (LCMS).³⁰ This study looked at similar actions as the other

²⁵ Gregory Brown, “The Priorities of the Heavenly Citizen (Colossians 3:15-17),” Bible.org, accessed April 20, 2017, <https://bible.org/seriespage/12-priorities-heavenly-citizen-colossians-315-17>.

²⁶ Richard Land: “Citizen Christian: Their Rights and Responsibilities,” accessed April 20, 2017, <http://www.drRichardLand.com/press/entry/citizen-christian-their-rights-and-responsibilities>.

²⁷ See Martha Louise Counts, “The Political Views of the Eighteenth Century New England Clergy As Expressed In Their Election Sermons” (PhD. Diss., Columbia University, 1956); Mark Noll, “The Election Sermon: Situating Religion and the Constitutional in the Eighteenth Century,” *DePaul L. Rev.* 59 (2009): 1223-1248; Harry Kerr, “The Election Sermon: Primer for Revolutionaries,” *Communication Monographs* 29 (1962): 13-22.

²⁸ Corwin Smidt et al., “The Political Attitudes and Activities of Mainline Protestant Clergy in the Election of 2000: A Study of Six Denominations,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 42 (2003): 515–532.

²⁹ The researchers asked clergy to indicate whether they had done any of the following during the election year: written a letter to an editor, signed or circulated a petition, contacted a public official, publicly endorsed a candidate, endorsed a candidate from the pulpit, taken a public stand on an issue, taken a stand on a political issue from the pulpit, touched on a political issue in a sermon, preached an entire sermon on an issue, formed a church political action group, formed a church political study group, boycotted over an issue, urged parishioners to vote, distributed voter guides, campaigned for a candidate, attended a political rally, worn a campaign button, joined a national political organization, participated in a protest, committed civil disobedience, run for public office, prayed publicly for a candidate, prayed publicly for an issue, joined a civic organization, joined a ministerial council, or been appointed to public office.

³⁰ James Guth et al., “The Political Activity of Evangelical Clergy in the Election of 2000: A Case Study of Five Denominations,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 42 (2003): 501-514.

one.³¹ The research found a similar stark divide in political activity in the study group: “about 16 percent of the [evangelical] ministers reported no political actions in 2000, while an equal percentage claimed 11 or more.”

There are some important differences between 2000 and 2016. While both elections were replacing a term-limited president, the 2016 election did not have a sitting administration official on the ballot. Second, there is the splintered interest of the Christian Right³² in 2016. That voting bloc was divided early on in the GOP primary season, perhaps because it was divided after eight years of a more liberal, social justice-oriented Christian Left dominating during the Obama administration. But in the end, the Christian Right—and one should note here, the Christian Right is largely a *white* Christian Right—helped propel Donald Trump to victory. Out of 47 ministers in my study, only two are non-white;³³ only two are female. While party affiliation is hard to know, the number of churches in the South—a historically deep “red” area—in my study can lead to the conclusion that many of the ministers from there would vote with the GOP.

The 2016 election was not just about the Christian Right. After the 2015 Supreme Court ruling legalizing same-sex marriage, the Christian Left reasserted its own political will. The Democratic candidate, Hillary Clinton, embraced the ruling and her Methodist heritage in promoting unity among her party in the areas of race, economics, and gender. Black ministers who heavily supported Barack Obama were also supportive of Clinton, but like much of the Democratic base, not as enthusiastically.³⁴

And there was Trump’s relationship with ministers and their predominantly white flocks. First, he promised ministers he would repeal the Johnson Amendment, which bans direct endorsements of candidates by churches. Second, like many GOP candidates before him, Trump courted white evangelical voters through the promise of Supreme Court justices, primarily to overturn *Roe v. Wade*. Yet this voting bloc was deeply divided about Trump. His comments on women, sexual assault, the other GOP candidates, his three marriages, and his lack of sophisticated religious understanding put church members who would otherwise be affiliated with the GOP candidate on a collision course between what many saw as the greater evil in Clinton and the lesser evil in Trump. While some evangelical leaders endorsed him, others withdrew endorsements. Still others remained silent.³⁵

One question of my study may be what has changed since 2000. The number of those not sermonizing in any fashion about the election was higher in my group than those who did not act politically in previous studies. This does not mean, of course, that those ministers did not commit

³¹As in the other study, the researchers looked at political activities such as writing letters to the editor, contacting public officials, and taking public stances on issues as well as pulpit-specific behavior such as taking a pulpit stand on an issue, preaching an entire sermon on an issue, or touching on an issue in a sermon.

³²This is obviously a complex term. But the divide between this and the Left I am staking out for the purposes of this article is most simply the lines of abortion, same-sex marriage, and females in the pulpit.

³³The two non-white preachers are Thabiti Anyabwile, pastor of Anacostia River Church in Washington, D.C., and Michael Oh, guest speaker at Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia on November 13 during its Fall Missions Festival. Oh is the director of the Lausanne Movement, a global missions group founded by Billy Graham in the 70s. Oh did not mention the election in his sermon.

³⁴For comparison of this group to 2000, see Eric McDaniel, “Black Clergy in the 2000 Election,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 42 (2003): 533-546.

³⁵The only minister who endorsed Hillary Clinton and for whom I could find an online sermon is Thabiti Anyabwile, pastor of Anacostia River Church in Washington, D.C. He endorsed Clinton in an article for The Gospel Coalition, one of the major conservative evangelical groups. Anyabwile’s sermon on November 13 did not mention the election. He continued his series from the book of Zechariah. Anyabwile was the only African-American minister in my study.

any other political act, personal or professional. But their silence on this Sunday is a good indicator they did not. The researchers who studied the 2000 election discovered that those ministers who tend to be more politically active also tend to be more closely linked to what the researchers called the civic gospel and civil religion. The latter, as defined by the study, is a belief that “religion generally had a salutary effect on social and political life.”³⁶ It is limited to Christianity, with its adherents believing that “the United States was founded as a Christian nation, that free enterprise is the only economic system truly compatible with Christian beliefs, that religious values are under attack in contemporary America, that government needs to act to protect the nation's religious heritage, that there is only one Christian view on most political issues, and that it is hard for political liberals to be true Christians.”³⁷ These two views are still strong in Christians, especially politically active ministers, and also appeared in my study. Yet the Guth study mentioned earlier noted that “professional role orientations are the best predictors of actual participation” in political activities by ministers.³⁸ In other words, how the ministers saw their roles both in public and in the church setting was the key factor in determining whether they committed any political acts. Some ministers in my study specifically said they did not see their role in the pulpit as telling people who to vote for.³⁹ Others did not endorse a candidate. And the many sermons that did not speak to the election before or after its outcome can be seen as a sign that those ministers did not see themselves as political actors.

It is hard, of course, to know the full thoughts of a minister on any subject and particularly from one sermon. But if we take as a subgroup the six sermons by preachers listed on Trump's evangelical advisory board and his public supporters in the pulpit, it is surprising to see that none of these ministers made a direct claim about America being a Christian nation. Three did not refer to the election at all. The other three took three different approaches to the election, a pattern that will appear in other sermons in my study. One of those approaches was from Todd Mullins, pastor of Christ Fellowship in South Florida, who said on November 6 that this election season “could be one of the greatest shining moments for the church” because it has “something the world doesn't have, love.”⁴⁰ Mullins made only a handful of references to the election in his sermon, noting the “election craziness” in the beginning and that “this election is like nothing we've ever seen.” He urged his parishioners to vote, adding “there is too much at stake in this election for you to just sit this one out.” He added later those stakes included religious freedom, abortion, “racial” issues and immigration issues.⁴¹

Two ministers in this subgroup spoke extensively about the election. Jim Garlow, pastor of Skyline Church in San Diego, which boasts an attendance of 2,500 parishioners each Sunday, preached directly about the election in an evening service on November 6. Garlow, a proponent of Pulpit Freedom Sunday, a movement to end the Johnson Amendment by defying it,⁴² forcefully dismissed any concerns a listener might have about the Internal Revenue Service: “If anybody else

³⁶ Guth et al., 506.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid., 501.

³⁹ One example is Brian Bill, pastor of Edgewood Baptist Church in Rock Island, IL. He said in his November 6 sermon that he wasn't sharing who he was voting for and he has “never used the pulpit (or [Communion] table) to proclaim my political views.”

⁴⁰ Todd is the son of Tom Mullins, founder of Christ Fellowship, who is listed on Trump's board.

⁴¹ Todd Mullins, “Decision 2016,” accessed Nov. 14, 2017, https://gochristfellowship.com/sermon_series/decision-2016/.

⁴² Garlow was also one of the organizers of a Washington D.C. prayer service for the president attended by 300 evangelical pastors just before the Inauguration. Trump did not attend.

is watching me right now or the IRS, sue me.”⁴³ Garlow was an outlier among Trump supporters and those on the candidate’s advisory board in this area. He was also the only minister to mention that rarely-enforced regulation. And of the six sermons given by public Trump supporters or members of his evangelical advisory board, only Garlow’s directly endorsed Trump.

The other minister in this subgroup who spoke extensively about the election was Jack Graham, pastor at Prestonwood Baptist in Dallas, which claims 35,000 members. Graham, whose church hosted a Texas presidential candidate forum for the 2016 election, focused on what the 2000 election studies called the most important “moral reform issues” that are “confronting the country.”⁴⁴ Graham mentioned a long list of issues that the “people of God” voted for in his November 13 sermon: (ending) abortion, religious freedom, national security, government integrity, the Supreme Court, legal immigration—all central issues to the GOP platform. But he directly noted that Prestonwood as a church doesn’t “endorse political parties or partisanship.” On the other hand, it is clear which candidate Graham preferred from the issues mentioned along with an initial claim that the only explanation for the election outcome was the “God factor” and that “the hand of God moved.”

Swing States

These different approaches mirror approaches made by ministers in the four swing states I studied. One would not expect many churches to specifically endorse, as has been the pattern for decades. Endorsements did not happen in the swing state churches. One would also expect a positive reaction to a Trump victory because many Christians and pastors align with GOP stances on abortion among other issues. That happened less than expected. The most consistent pattern in these swing state sermons was preachers responding to the division both in the nation and their congregation.

Florida

In Florida, the county with the biggest victory for Trump was Lafayette County, with a population of about 8,800 (82.8 percent). There was not a church in that county that had a sermon online, or in the county with the second biggest victory (Baker, 81.5 percent, population about 27,000). I did, however, discover a church—Shiloh Baptist, Chipley—in the third-biggest county, Washington (77.4 percent, population 25,000). The minister there, Tim Patton, used the recent Veterans Day (the Friday before Sunday, Nov. 11) to speak about the freedoms in America, freedoms which make it the “greatest nation on the earth.”⁴⁵ The central question he posed to his church was “how are you using your freedom?” One of the freedoms he mentioned was prayer. He said in America, unlike other nations, a person can pray in restaurants. Later he spoke of those people Christians should pray for, including “those people that were protesting and burning the buildings down because” they didn’t “like who got elected for president.” He also said Christians should pray for our national leaders, adding “depending on where you are with the current election that may be difficult.”

The county with the biggest victory for Clinton was Gadsden County (67.9 percent), with a population of 46,000 and located about 60 miles from Chipley. At the First Presbyterian Church

⁴³ Jim Garlow, “Election 2016,” accessed Nov. 14, 2017, <https://vimeo.com/190484470>.

⁴⁴ Jack Graham, “A Prayer for America,” accessed Nov. 14, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZSn5t0G9eDE>.

⁴⁵ Tim Patton, “Being Thankful for Freedom,” accessed Nov. 14, 2017, <http://www.shilohbaptist.net/sermon/mediaposts/being-thankful-for-freedom>.

(U.S.A.) in Quincy on November 13, the sermon was given by the church's pastor, Christopher Erde.⁴⁶ Like other churches, this church follows a three-year liturgical calendar, with scriptures chosen for that date well in advance. Erde described the Gospel reading for this Sunday as "forward-looking and apocalyptic."⁴⁷ Yet he also noted that because "I think most folks are worn out by all the end of the world talk this week," he would not comment on the passage's signs for a coming apocalypse. He also did this because, as he noted, it is also Commitment Sunday, where members annually pledge money for the coming year to the church.

Pennsylvania

Of the three sermons from Philadelphia County, where Clinton had her biggest victory (82.4 percent), we see one minister give great emphasis to the election, one mention it in the beginning and not return to it, and a third not reference it at all.

The minister who framed his entire homily on the election was Father Sean Mullen, minister at St. Marks, part of the Episcopal Church in Philadelphia. Like Erde's church, this church follows the liturgical calendar that had Luke 21 as the reading for this day. Mullen stated that the apocalyptic nature of the Luke 21 reading "would seem to play perfectly into the hand of a preacher seeking to comment on this week's election," adding that "many Episcopalians" especially would find these verses echoing "how this year's election feels."⁴⁸ But arguing that "the present moment feels a little more Old Testament than New," he turned to the Old Testament reading for that Sunday in Malachi⁴⁹ for a "biblical commentary on the national moment." He chose this scripture because it was directed at the lackluster offerings of the priests, calling the passage "essentially a stewardship sermon" which suited the purposes of Commitment Sunday. (He suggested "a resounding rejoinder to give generously might be counted as somewhat less balm than is required to soothe the present moment, if indeed soothing is what is called for.")

The key line in the Malachi text for the minister is "Beware that you are not led astray." In applying this line to the "national moment," Mullen argued he cannot "steer wide of such commentary" because Jesus did not avoid such topics. He suggested his flock should beware lest they have been led astray by a "sad" election that had "an air of convenient religiosity." The effect of the election was that truth is "still lying bleeding in the public square and even if one can admit its presence, many find themselves asking the question Pilate asked: 'what is truth?'" In these "times of trouble" the church has the "perfect response": turning from wariness and anxiety to hope. "Remember the promise of God" that after arrests, persecutions, and imprisonment, "the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings."

At Freedom Church, a non-denominational church that is part of the Every Nation network of "Christ-centered, Spirit-empowered, socially responsible" churches and campus ministries, Gabriel Bouch began his November 13 sermon by asking his congregation to think "about the perspective that we should have on this moment in history."⁵⁰ He turned to the Joshua story of the walls of Jericho. Bouch suggests that sometimes when we are "caught up" in the affairs of this world, God "pulls back the curtain and allows us to see some greater invisible realities." He told his listeners that while "we should be engaged in the political activities in the world, yet in another

⁴⁶ The Thirty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time had Luke 21:5-19 as the Gospel Lesson.

⁴⁷ Christopher Erde, accessed Nov. 14, 2017, http://firstpresquincy.org/sermons/?sermon_id=206.

⁴⁸ Sean Mullins, "Two Words and a Promise," accessed Nov. 15, 2017, <http://www.saintmarksphiladelphia.org/sermons/?offset=1480447752763>.

⁴⁹ Malachi 3:19-20a.

⁵⁰ Gabriel Bouch, "Coming Together as a Church," accessed Nov. 15, 2017, <https://freedomchurchphilly.org/sermons/coming-together-as-the-church>.

sense there should be some element of detachment,” adding our earthly citizenship is not “ultimate.” This means Christians are called to “stand for righteousness no matter the political climate.” He then turned to the killing of Abel by Cain, asking the question the latter asks of God: “Am I my brother’s keeper?” This scripture frames his comment about the 2016 election. He noted that there has been “an element of our society that has been emboldened” by the election to “attack our non-white brothers and sisters.” He told the “white” people in the crowds that they should not let minorities “fend for themselves” in standing against “unrighteousness,” “sexism,” and “bigotry.” Applause can be heard on the audio at this moment. He then called for his church to do the “hard” work of standing with and understanding one another: “My hope is we lean into one another.” He then ends his comments with a prayer, noting God is not on a “side.” He asked God to work in the next administration and notes the church “stands for” religious freedom, hope, and life.⁵¹

I could not find an online sermon for the county Trump won with the largest percentage of votes (Fulton County 84.2 percent, with 15,000 people). But in the second-biggest county (Bedford County 82.8 percent, with 50,000 people), I found two. Both mentioned the election sparingly. At Acts Community Church, a non-denominational church in Bedford, John Bennett used Proverbs 29:18⁵² to suggest that some in the United States are “casting off restraint like never before.”⁵³ He noted the post-election anger and violence are driven by the “half of the country” who doesn’t believe Trump “serves their agenda.” He reminded his listeners that God has an agenda, “the kingdom of God.” This “plan for the world” is contained in the Bible. Those who are spiritually blind don’t follow this “vision” from God and so “perish.” But the “citizens” of this kingdom do, experiencing God’s “reign” already.

At the Bedford Church of the Nazarene, Ernie Ley, an associate pastor, joked that the lead minister, Mike Dennis, was “pretty sneaky” to preach all the Sundays leading up to Election Day but to give Ley the one after “all the votes are counted.”⁵⁴ Ley asked himself if he had spent as much time “reading my Bible” as he had spent reading his “tweets and news reports” about the election. He implied he spent more time on the latter and admitted that he was struggling “just like everyone else with the debacle of what seems to be happening in this great country we call America.” He then suggested that “in the grand scheme of things” Americans “are continually trying to give human answers to spiritual problems that have contributed to a great emptiness felt both in our individual and our collective soul.” It is a “futile” task apart from the “vine,” Jesus. And so he asked: What is the Christian response to a world that has “abandoned the principles upon which it was created?” What is the church’s response to “a creation that has drifted so far from its creator?” The answer is hope. The sermon then develops the main claim of how God’s “future” can break into “our present” through Hebrews 6:13-20. The end of the sermon returned to the present moment. Ley reminded his listeners that the president, Congress, political parties, or “some type of legislation” can’t bring “ultimate peace and goodness.” Christians are called to “engage” but not in “such a way that you simply try to advance the ideals and platforms of a particular candidate or a party.” Instead the engagement should be Christians asking “God to empower you to help” and so give hope.

⁵¹ On the third church, Tenth Presbyterian, see footnote 33.

⁵² “Where there is no revelation, people cast off restraint; but blessed is the one who heeds wisdom’s instruction.”

⁵³ John Bennett, “Thy Kingdom Come,” accessed Nov. 15, 2017, <http://actschurch.com/multimedia-archive/thy-kingdom-come/>.

⁵⁴ Ernie Ley, “Prisoners of Hope,” accessed Nov. 15, 2017, http://www.bcn.org/content.cfm?id=213&download_id=176.

Wisconsin

The county with the biggest victory for Trump was Florence County (71.6 percent and a population just under 4,500). At Saint John's Lutheran in Florence, Jason Liebenow did not mention the election at all. Instead, he used his sermon on the latter part of Luke 20 to compare the fragility and temporal nature of human relationships to the "Undying Love" of Jesus Christ. He insisted that "through Jesus, our relationship with God is so strong that not even death can separate us from him."⁵⁵

In the county with the biggest victory for Clinton (Menominee County, 78.4 percent), I could not find any online sermons. The county with the second-biggest victory (Dane County, 71.4 percent) had plenty as it is home to the state capital, Madison. Of four churches there I surveyed, only one, Asbury United Methodist Church, did not mention the election. It continued its series "Getting in Touch with our Spiritual Heritage," retelling the history of John Wesley.

The three other sermons presented a distinct "before and after" picture. On November 6, at Cathedral Parish in downtown Madison, Monsignor Kevin Holmes said that "on this weekend before our national election," it's "poignant to hear" about "God's final victory over the unleashing of evil" in the Last Judgment.⁵⁶ But this judgment would not come as a progressive victory for the church but after much torment. Then he suggested there was "the real possibility of the church in this country facing direct persecution." With bans on Catholic groups facilitating adoptions because they refuse to help same-sex couples adopt, the monsignor noted Catholics "are no longer allowed to participate as full partners in the life of our society." He noted "a very reasonable fear" of further marginalization due to "our national elections." While he did not name the candidate the Church feared winning, it is clear it was Clinton. This is because the monsignor said that the marginalization of Catholics would likely include making it "impossible for the church to maintain her sponsorship of any hospital in the United States," an outcome of Clinton's support of Obamacare. Most frighteningly to the monsignor, it seems, would be a general future consensus that "the Catholic faith could be construed as a hate crime." At the end he prayed that "in good times and in bad [God] might strengthen us to give witness to him."⁵⁷

At First Presbyterian (U.S.A.) of Waunakee, just outside Madison, the Rev. Kirk Morledge entitled his November 6 sermon "Casting Your Kingdom Vote."⁵⁸ Like others, he said he needed "a break from the strident rhetoric of this earthly realm" and that came in the form of the World Series, won by the Cubs for the first time in more than a hundred years. He told his congregants he planned to vote and hoped they do the same. Invoking the dual citizenship, he suggested that when he votes—exercising his right as a "citizen on this earthly kingdom"—he tries to "think of things that my king wants me to work for, things like justice, righteousness, peace, mercy, the plight of the poor—these are things my king cares a lot about." He added that he prays as he casts his vote, praying for the people of this country, "young, old, rich, poor, black, white, marginalized, depressed, leaders, followers, everybody." He gave thanks for freedoms like the right to vote, and those who died to protect those freedoms. Then he asked God to "guide my voting." The minister

⁵⁵ Jason Liebenow, "Undying Love," accessed March 28, 2017, <http://www.stjohnsflorencewi.com/sermons.php>.

⁵⁶ Kevin Holmes, "The Final Resurrection," accessed Nov. 15, 2017, <http://www.isthmuscatholic.org/resources/media/608/>.

⁵⁷ The church did not post an online sermon for November 13.

⁵⁸ Kevin Morledge, "Casting Your Kingdom Vote," accessed Nov. 15, 2017, <https://player.fm/series/first-presbyterian-church-waunakee/casting-your-kingdom-vote>.

tries to be “open to the Holy Spirit even at that last moment... I try to go in with a little bit of openness to the Lord God because you never know what might happen right at that moment.”⁵⁹

The “after” picture comes from the sermon by Marc Maillefer on November 13 at Door Creek Church, a multi-campus evangelical church in Madison. Maillefer continued his series on the “unexpected, a journey of faith” but he began his message with some comments on “what’s going on in our nation” and the “realities of our day,” particularly the “opportunities” for Christians.⁶⁰ He evoked the deeply “divided” nation—“divisions around race and gender, around class, around the generations, between the generations, between the political parties.” These divisions flow “right out of some of the deep fear that existed before the election and certainly will exist after the election.” His wife told him of Latino students in tears “just completely afraid of what [the election] meant for family or friends. He mentioned the anger of many, and the breakdown of “civil discourse.” And then he suggested that these divisions exist in the church as well. He noted that “some are saying I don’t want to go to life group [the church’s midweek home-based Bible studies] this week because I know how they voted.” But “by God’s grace, we’ve been trying to keep Christ at the center.”

He added that “politics divides, but the gospel is what unites.” The mission of the church is “made harder” when Christians get distracted by “thinking somehow that politics is the answer to the world’s problems.” He then pointed out that more than 80 percent of white evangelicals voted for Trump. The perception then is that such people are “a bunch of hypocrites. You say you love Jesus but you don’t follow Jesus. You don’t care about the poor. You don’t care about minorities.” That perception “makes it harder for us.” He added “God is on the throne, he’s in control, and Jesus Christ is still our only hope.” He then prayed for unity and that his church would “grow to be more famous in our city as we love and serve like you, Jesus.”

North Carolina

The county with the biggest victory for Trump was Yadkin County (79.6 percent, home to about 36,000 people). Located to the west of Winston-Salem, its county seat is Yadkinville. There one finds, as mentioned above, Collide Church. While it is non-denominational (and therefore autonomous), it partners with the Southern Baptist Convention and the Liberty Church Network, the church planting organization started by Jerry Falwell in 1981. Its four-part “Election Infection” series was followed by a series on heaven and hell,⁶¹ the problem of evil, and healthy relationships.

With every sermon the church publishes a “discussion guide.” Its discussion guide for the opening sermon in the “Election Infection” series (called “A Write-in for Righteousness”)⁶² notes two “groups that people fall into when it comes to politics: political abstinent and political activists.” Those groups contrast with Christians, who are not necessarily a “balance” between the two. The guide asks its readers: “How can we make sure that politics do not become more

⁵⁹ Who the minister is voting for in the earthly election is not named. But on his “kingdom ballot” he notes that he “can vote for a leader who will never let me down... a leader who will keep every promise... a leader who will never leave me, never lie to me, never forsake me, never do wrong, never mess up, a leader I can trust completely.”

⁶⁰ Marc Maillefer, “Unexpected - When Fear Trips Us Up... Again,” accessed Nov. 15, 2017, <http://doorcreekchurch.org/messages/all-messages/unexpected-when-fear-trips-us-up-again/>.

⁶¹ “Being heavenly minded” was the topic on November 13. The minister that day, Matt Reinhardt, said at the end of his sermon that Christians are concerned with the world, but that they have to “give that concern to God and know that he is going to take care of it... especially in this past week. God is in control.” See <http://www.collidechurch.com/what-happens-to-you-when-you-die>.

⁶² “Election Infection: A Write-In for Righteousness—Psalm 146:1-10,” Collide Church, accessed April 20, 2017, <http://www.collidechurch.com/files/community-groups/2016/09-18.pdf>.

important than our faith? How can the way we discuss politics keep us from having the chance to influence others for the sake of Christ?” In questioning Psalm 146:7-9,⁶³ the guide asks: “How can we be guilty of expecting the government to do things that the church should do?” It is unclear which actions in the verse the guide thinks fall into either category.

The third sermon in the series (called “The United Church of Jesus Christ”) had a discussion guide⁶⁴ that asks: “How should the church stand out during this election season? Should we still be active participants in politics? How can we reflect Jesus during this crazy time?” The final sermon (called “Make America Great Again”) suggested that the “American church” judge itself before others. Its discussion guide⁶⁵ asks: “What do we [Christians] need to do to begin to clean up the church so that God will be great in America again?”

The county with the biggest victory for Clinton was Durham (78.9 percent, home to Duke University and more than 260,000 people). Three out of four sermons I found mentioned the election. The November 13 sermon at First Reformed Presbyterian in Durham continued the church’s series on Genesis. But at St. Philip’s Episcopal Church in Durham, the homily on Luke 21 noted that “despite the disasters of this world, despite the ugly words of this world, despite her ugly politics, despite her ugly injustices... God is in control.”⁶⁶ At First Presbyterian (U.S.A.) of Durham, the minister on Nov. 13 announced at the beginning of the sermon that “this Sunday isn’t any other Sunday, is it? This Sunday is different.”⁶⁷ The sermon then summarized the division in the nation, in its churches, families, and cities. It suggested that “many people are afraid,” especially in Durham where the Ku Klux Klan announced it would hold a rally celebrating the election outcome. The sermon then noted some of the hate crimes that had occurred since Election Day. Then it praised the congregation because it “has stood up to protect and to fight for” the rights of those who are victims of these crimes—specifically “our Muslim neighbors,” “our LGBTQ brothers and sisters,” and Latinos who fear deportation. This congregation continues to “stand up” for these people “because this is who we are as a people of God and followers of Christ.” Minister Mindy Douglas then mentioned that the church opened its sanctuary on Wednesday morning for prayer. And her time in prayer directed her to Psalm 46, which reads “Be still and know that I am God.” “I read these words and it was as if a great weight had been lifted from my shoulders. I was still confused and worried about the future... but [those words were] a reminder that God is God.”

At Summit Church in Durham, which claims 10,000 worshippers across nine campuses, J. D. Greear used a few minutes at the beginning of his November 13 sermon (which continued a series on the stories of the Bible) to address the election.⁶⁸ Greear admitted he was “dazed and confused” the morning after the election. He offered “empathy” to those “who are worried or fearful right now,” including statements directed at African-Americans, women, Hispanics, and

⁶³ “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.”

⁶⁴ “Election Infection: The United Church of Jesus Christ—Romans 13:1-14,” Collide Church, accessed April 20, 2017, <http://www.collidechurch.com/files/community-groups/2016/10-02.pdf>.

⁶⁵ “Election Infection: How to Make America Great Again—2 Chronicles 7:14,” Collide Church, accessed April 20, 2017, <http://www.collidechurch.com/files/community-groups/2016/10-09.pdf>.

⁶⁶ Jonah Kendall, “26th Pentecost,” accessed Nov. 15, 2017, http://st-philips-durham.dionc.org/dfc/newsdetail_2/3182178.

⁶⁷ Mindy Douglas, “Christ the Center,” accessed Nov. 15, 2017, <https://firstpres-durham.org/2016/11/christ-the-center/>.

⁶⁸ J.D. Greear, “Multiplying in Every Way,” accessed Nov. 15, 2017, <https://www.summitrdu.com/message/multiplying-in-every-way/>.

Muslims. He said he chose those groups because of the “repulsive and indefensible things” Trump had said about members of those groups and the actions others had taken against them. He also addressed the congregation as a whole and suggested the non-Trump voters give “the same benefit of the doubt [to Trump voters] that you want them to give you on your motives.” He called on Christians to reject the agenda of the “irresponsible media that thrives on creating controversy and division.” He urged his listeners to continue on with the “mission” of the church, adding that mission “wouldn’t have changed had Secretary Clinton been elected.” Finally, he suggested that the unity in Jesus “runs deeper” than any political unity, evoking dual citizenship by adding “if you are more concerned with who won or lost this election than you are [with] souls being saved, you’re probably a citizen of the wrong kingdom.”

Biggest State Victories

The state that Trump won with the largest percentage vote was Wyoming (he won 70 percent of the vote). The county in that state which gave him the biggest total percentage was Crook (88.8 percent). I did not find an online sermon there. The second-place county was Campbell (88 percent), home to Gillette. It is the third-most-populous county in the state, with about 46,000 people. One out of five churches there that had an online sermon mentioned the election.⁶⁹ At Living Rock Church, part of the Evangelical Free Church of America, a conservative collection of churches, Mark Stevens continued with his series on the Holy Spirit by connecting events in the news to “fruits” of the Spirit mentioned in Galatians 5. He insisted that he won’t be making “any comments” on the election outcome, but he noted that he is “glad to have it done because the mudslinging is done and the arguing is mostly done.”⁷⁰ He hopes the nation is “on the other side” and trying to heal. He then moved to riots in Egypt and a story of a Christian man protecting a Muslim from physical assault. This was the effect of the Holy Spirit, Stevens argued.

The state that Clinton won with the largest percentage vote was Hawaii (she won 62.3 percent of the vote). The county with the biggest total was Maui (64.5 percent). There sits Hope Chapel. The sermon on November 13 began with a joke: the unanswered prayer that Jesus would return before the election. The minister, Craig Englert, suggested he did not know how the election results were affecting all his listeners but he noted that Christians “trust in the sovereign work of God.”⁷¹ He then told them that they should pray for the political leaders at all levels in the nation. That prayer is supposed to have the effect of allowing Christians to live “peaceful and quiet lives marked by godliness and dignity.” A few seconds of applause followed these words.

Hall County, Georgia

One interesting pattern from Hall County is that out of 11 sermons I found online, only three mentioned the election.⁷² This is a reversal from the overall pattern nationwide, yet mirrors

⁶⁹ The churches that didn’t mention the election were High Plains Community Church (associated with the Evangelical Church denomination), First United Methodist, and two non-denominational churches, New Life Church and Journey Church.

⁷⁰ Mark Stevens, “Holy Spirit – Spiritual Gifts,” accessed Nov. 15, 2017, <http://livingrockgillette.com/sermons-living-rock-church.html>.

⁷¹ Craig Englert, “Preparing to Receive the Holy Spirit,” accessed Nov. 15, 2017, <http://hopechapelmaui.com/sermon-archives/preparing-to-receive-the-holy-spirit/>.

⁷² I am not counting in the three sermon at First Baptist Gainesville by Bill Coates in which he noted when speaking about education and wages in a sermon on the “balance” between work and rest that “everyone who ran in the recent presidential election says they’re committed to raising wages...” See <http://www.fbcgainesville.org/the-balanced-life-work-and-rest>.

Trump's biggest state win, Wyoming. At St. Gabriel's Episcopal Church in Oakwood, the minister began the sermon by noting "it's been a strange, surreal week in Lake Wobegon," referencing the fictional town created by Garrison Keillor.⁷³ The sermon by Peter Wallace described some in the congregation who were "elated," some who were "despondent," and some who were "in shock." Wallace then said Jesus' disciples probably felt the same way when they heard he would destroy the temple in Luke 21. About halfway through the sermon Wallace returned to the election, noting that "for some this may feel like the end times." The "deep division in our country" and in "our own families... could make this Thanksgiving very interesting." Wallace then urged people on either side of the political divide to continue to do God's work: "listening to God's call to serve the poor, the marginalized, those who may need more help and support or care than ever before."

At Riverbend Baptist, a member of the Southern Baptist Convention, Mike Dorough continued with his series on Philippians but not before making a few comments on the election. He said the church should pray for the new administration, Congress, and the Supreme Court.⁷⁴ He said this prayer would "lift" up these leaders as they "lead our great nation." Then he said he hopes that the American church would "never be guilty of thinking that our answers are political." Then he praised God for "a pro-life president and a pro-life Congress" and asked for a "revival" of the nation. He added at the end of the sermon that he expected different results from the election and he would have been "at peace" with that other result because his "house is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness."

At 12 Stone Church, a large, multi-campus church in the Wesleyan Church but also within the Willow Creek Association,⁷⁵ Pastor Kevin Myers noted in his sermon in a series on spiritual warfare that this election was similar to ones he had seen in his lifetime: "one party wins and celebrates and one party loses and commiserates..."⁷⁶ He added that the losing group always sees the loss as the Apocalypse. He then played a video by widely syndicated radio and television broadcaster Tony Evans that highlighted the heavenly citizenship of Christians. Myers noted afterward that Christians "do not put our faith in government; we put our faith in God." Because God is "on the throne permanently," the church can "remain focused in our mission."⁷⁷

Conclusion

The central question of my study was how did ministers frame the election, if at all? Nearly two-thirds of the ministers in this study mentioned the 2016 election in some manner, showing its importance. Diversity of audience, the role of clergy as political actors and a tension with their other primary role of minister, and the hearts of their flock as constraints pushed at the ministers in different ways, producing different *kairotic* moments. The wide array of comments shows that

⁷³ Peter Wallace, accessed March 7, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCp8Q4jmKa52plvIMHRbjS6Q>.

⁷⁴ Mike Dorough, "I Choose Joy," accessed Nov. 15, 2017, <https://www.rbbc.net/i-choose-joy-week-11-philippians-414-23/>.

⁷⁵ "About WCA," Willow Creek Association, accessed April 30, 2017, <https://www.willowcreek.com/about>.

⁷⁶ Kevin Myers, "Revel in Righteousness," accessed Nov. 15, 2017, <https://12stone.com/watch/unseen/revel-in-righteousness/>.

⁷⁷ Myers referenced an October 23 sermon in which he explained why he does not "talk more" about politics from the pulpit. In that sermon Myers noted that Christianity is "bigger" than politics and God does not "choose sides the way we do." He suggested his role as pastor is not to figure out how to "unite us in politics; my agenda is to unite us in Christ." He added that he might talk politics after he and another could agree on the "teachings of Christ and that the Bible is God's word." On the candidates in the 2016 election, he noted that "we are dealing with candidates who disrespect the law, who disrespect people..." and this applies to both. Myers suggested the bad behavior by the candidates mirrors the nation and so we get "the candidates we deserve." See <https://12stone.com/watch/faithpoliticschurch/faith-politics-church/>

while the election of 2016 may have had one clear political outcome, what it meant—what it *is*—to American churches remains complex.

While some ministers struggled to frame the event for the diverse audiences they assumed before them, others chose not to frame it at all. This silence can be interpreted to mean that despite a healthy dual citizenship, one does not speak of the earthly part in church. Yet the sermons that addressed the election aimed to give Christians instructions on how to live out that paradox. One of those instructions was to vote. But for whom was left vague in all but one sermon. This can be interpreted as a sign not only of the stated desires of many preachers to not use their pulpits as campaign sites, but also the ways in which a heavenly citizenship is more important not only at that moment—the Sunday after the Tuesday—but every day.

Overall, like Perkins' study of sermons after September 11, my study on the sermons after the 2016 election sought to make "the national experience" that day "an impetus for strengthening evangelical commitments."⁷⁸ Many preachers were reluctant commentators on the election, but forceful advocates for those actions. One of those actions was to "love" those who voted the "other way." That instruction marked the central teaching of the *kairotic* moment, unity. King's definition of *kairos* as "God's time" returns as important. What did God want from his followers post-election? How did God's Word aid them in framing their practice in the future? The sermons answered in different ways, but one similar way across the board was a move toward healing.

These sermons reflect the divided America that went to the polls a few days earlier. A final instruction then was to consider the sovereignty of God. It is perhaps this instruction that would redefine that moment—moving the people in the pew from what one minister called a "convenient religiosity" to one that indeed prioritized faith in Jesus over fidelity to anything else. These sermons called on God to unite the church and called on the church to seek God. These studies then show the overwhelming aim of sermons in American Christianity remains teaching the Christian life, even in times of national crisis and change.

⁷⁸ Perkins, 220.