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## Election Results and God's Kingdom

This past weekend we had the opportunity to spend a few days away. On Sunday, because of a scheduled event on Sunday afternoon, we had to begin our travels homeward, and we were unable to attend a worship service in a local church. We decided to listen to a worship service from one of my former congregations. The one who delivered the message that day was a high school student in that church when I was the pastor there, and it was good to listen to him. Sam and his wife are living what we might call a non-traditional Christian lifestyle, choosing to live in a rather impoverished area of a small city in Ontario. They make it their ministry to reach out to neighbours to befriend them with the hope of sharing God's grace with them. Many of their neighbours are recent immigrants who have come to Canada to have a better life for themselves and their children.

Many immigrants who come to Canada have the same dreams that we have as Canadians. They want to live in a place that is free from oppression and violence and where there is the opportunity to thrive and prosper. Sam, in his message, mentioned the impending election (now over, of course) and what he said sparked my interest.

Sam said that many immigrants to Canada leave countries where the governments are corrupt and the judicial system has failed. They see Canada as a place where the leaders care about the people and where there is hope for the future. Sadly, many of them have experienced a significant level of disappointment because they have discovered that Canada is not perfect. While we may say that there is opportunity in our country for anyone who seeks to get ahead, the reality is that if we aren't part of a community or social structure where we have access to that opportunity, we probably won't be able to achieve our dreams. Most of us have what we have simply because we have been given opportunities not afforded to those whose parents were not already well established. Most of us would not be able to achieve what we have without having been catapulted to our positions by those who have gone before us. We have a significant advantage, although we often do not recognize it.

Sam, in his message, talked about the impending election (now over, of course). He said that many Canadians are feeling stress as they sense that the doors of opportunity are becoming less available to them, and they are looking for someone to solve their problems. He said that after the election many Canadians are going to be disappointed that the party they voted for did not take power, and they will have a bleak outlook of the future. Long-time Canadians, he said, are not much different from immigrants because we too are looking for a government which will make our problems go away. And, like the immigrants who had hoped for more when they came to Canada, we will be disappointed, for no government will fulfill our expectations.

Sam went on to talk about how followers of Jesus Christ are not first and foremost citizens of a particular nation. We are citizens of the Kingdom of God, and it is to Jesus Christ to whom we hold our first allegiance. How we vote (and live) must be filtered through our commitment to the Kingdom of God and

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its King, Jesus Christ. Our commitment to the Kingdom of God must be primary come before all other commitments.

As we well know the values of the Kingdom of God do not align with any political party, and for understandable reasons. Governments of nations rule by using their power and authority to accomplish their goals, and it is necessary for them to do so. Any government that does not use its power (either legitimately gained or otherwise) to rule will not be able to function as the government. But that is not the way of Jesus. Jesus gained his position of authority by giving his life on the cross (see Philippians 2:5-11), and it is by his self-sacrifice that he defeated the powers that cause oppression, violence and brokenness. Those who follow him are called to live with the same kind of sacrifice, offering our lives for service to God (Romans 12:1-2). It is in this way that the Kingdom of God becomes influential and begins to bring change to our world.

Sam and his wife believe that God is calling them to live in a rather radical way, sacrificing their lives by choosing to live in an undesirable neighbourhood, one which their real estate agent had warned them about. They are following God's call to reach out to a particularly marginalized segment of our Canadian society with the love and grace of God as we have experienced it in Jesus Christ. Their ministry is very challenging and yet very rewarding. Knowing Sam from several years ago, I am quite confident that he has a fairly decided opinion as to which political party he would support, but that is not his first priority. His first priority is to be a servant to his neighbours so that their lives can be transformed by the saving work of Jesus Christ. His vote will be cast for the political party that best enables him to do that, even while he fully recognizes that it is not the new government that will make the reign of Christ known but, rather, the sacrificial living of the follower of Jesus Christ. Sam and his wife have heard God's calling to live in this non-traditional way and have responded positively because they have put their commitment to the Kingdom of God before all other commitments.

We are not all called to live as Sam and his wife live. Not all of us are called to be non-traditional in our lifestyles. But all of us are called to give first allegiance to the Kingdom of God and to submit ourselves fully and sacrificially to following Jesus Christ. We can do that regardless of what political party holds power.

In the rhetoric leading up to the election, it seemed to me that many people believed fully that the future of Canada would be determined by the one who gained power in Ottawa. While it is true that the path of Canadians will be determined in part by the kind of government that has gained power, it is also true that the real change in our world will be determined by the coming of the Kingdom of God to the lives of individuals and communities. And that change only comes through the work of God as the Holy Spirit equips and uses willing followers of Jesus Christ to fulfill the calling God has placed on their lives. For many, the outcome of the election is a crucial thing, but I wonder how important it is for God. Probably far less important for him than it is for us. But what is important for God the Father is that Jesus Christ reigns and that the Holy Spirit is equipping people to give their lives to live for Jesus. That is what will make the difference, in the long run.

*Pastor Gary*