



## Today's Election and Tomorrow's Hope

Rochester recently had eight straight days of rain, but we expect clear skies tomorrow. The forecast for our nation is cloudy. Our traumas are unrelenting, we are painfully divided, and we still don't know what election news (if any) the morning will bring.

What we do know is that tomorrow the earth, the sun, and the moon will follow their courses. The trees will stretch into the soil and sky. The animals - whether they scurry, fly, swim, or burrow - will be true to their God-given natures and do what they always do. The question for us is whether we will do what we always do, or strive for something better, to live out the best of what we are called to be.

We are a loving Christian college community blessed with a diversity of experiences and perspectives, but we are not immune from the brokenness of this age. Too often we Americans have misused our freedom, followed idols of power and quick gain, yielded to impatience and bitterness, and left un-tilled the soil of our character. Tomorrow's election result will not heal our hearts, our relationships, or our country. For that, you and I must take action. This election is just about over. Our work has just begun.

### Handling Tomorrow Morning

Wednesday morning (should we have a decision by then) will cause some to be despondent, others dogmatic, others detached. Each can do better.

The joy some of us will have in the morning should be tempered by knowing that our families and communities will remain as divided and broken as ever. Electoral victory brings a responsibility to "bind up the wounds of those who have borne the battle." Remember, too, that being in the majority does not mean being right and any sense of vindication is an illusion. Well named are the spoils that belong to victors, for they induce sickness in any who do not partake with humility and love. If you wake up relieved, take on the burdens of those in mourning.

Wednesday will bring to some of us increased isolation, the feeling that the country has changed, that people just don't get it, that we are strangers in a strange land. Aeschylus wrote that "those in exile feed on dreams." If you feel further exiled from family, friends, and country, feed on dreams in which you grow stronger and wiser, and bring people together. This is God's manna for you.

For the despondent and detached, the day will bring a chance to build the integrity of our souls and to see ourselves clearly, as on a late-night walk that passes for a moment under a streetlight. Let sorrow bind us to others as well. Even on these darkened streets, when we cannot see others, the sound of footsteps, as with all sounds, echo inside of us.

Lean in, gain all you can, do your part and leave the rest up to God. Let regret steal none of your precious life.



## Practical Steps for Change

We are heavily burdened in a time without handshakes and hugs. We are more isolated than ever, left with words as a substitute for human touch and presence. Yet our words themselves are as isolated as we are. Never have words been less prepared to bear the weight placed upon them.

Why is it so hard for us to talk with one another?

We all can do more to be our best with one another, but many have exhausted themselves with good intentions, finding only frustration in our conversations with loved ones. Overwhelmed and stressed, we lack time to truly investigate the issues that divide us. Internet algorithms channel our views right back to us, and journalists, motivated to increase revenue, rarely give us the facts and studies we need to think things through for ourselves. Emboldened by gerrymandering, politicians preach to their base, painting political opponents as unenlightened, uncompassionate or un-American. They pressure us all the time not to think for ourselves.

But we have the power to reignite our independence. We can say to the chaos, “You are not me, you are not my family, you are not God, you are not America.” We can take back control of our hearts and minds, walking with God and one another towards genuine community. Here are some first steps.

1. Pursue love and truth above all else. Let’s have a commitment to love and truth that supersedes any concern that “our side wins.” If we love genuinely and invite scrutiny of cherished beliefs, this integrity will bind us to those who think differently.
2. Commit to civility. Civility is savoring and strengthening the humanity of those with whom we disagree. We speak well of them, do not impugn their motives, and do not dismiss them with insults and stereotypes. Civility means being as kind to one another as we are serious about finding truth.
3. Reject means-end thinking. Those who do anything to promote their ends cannot achieve anything lasting. Throughout history, means-end thinking has delivered no permanent good, but only morally bankrupt societies saddled with hatred, division, and fear. We must love the right way as much as the right results.
4. Think for yourself. Most issues are complicated and no one person or party can be right all the time. Let’s take pride in our independence, thinking through each issue for ourselves. Let the partisan purists complain that we have betrayed them when we depart from the party line. We choose integrity over conformity.
5. Develop intellectual humility. Intellectual humility is a search for truth grounded in love, a recognition of our limitations, and the realization that smart, good-hearted people can disagree. Along with other virtues like empathy, patience, and courage, it is a strong defense against manipulation and polarization.
6. Examine your biases and think more clearly. Make a habit of uncovering your own biases, motives and mistakes. Become familiar with fallacies and psychological quirks, how they impact our thinking and are used against us. For real progress in discussions, find a discrete issue, agree on what good evidence



- would be, and then look for it together, sharing sources and facts. Small successes encourage more dialogue.
7. Seek out opposing viewpoints, empathize, and explore shared values. Spend time with those who think differently, ask about their feelings and stories, and imagine experiencing the world as they do. Everyone wants to feel respected and heard, and this sets us free to explore evidence together and reflect on what we have in common. Everyone cares about their families and wants America to be strong, prosperous, and just. We share many of the same fears and hopes, so let's explore them together.
  8. Focus on what transforms. Let's not be so fixated on our problems that we lose sight of the transforming vision of God. Everything we long for has its beginnings and endings in him. God is Truth, Beauty, Justice, Love. We are "anxious and troubled about many things," but in God's presence is rest, insight and transformation.

## Conclusion

This season has shown that we are not as mature and clear-sighted as we like to think. We often see others as enemies or obstacles, as ignorant or even evil. We can see ourselves as objective, clear-thinking, even prophetic. What we often want is control, to remake the world in our image. If we take ourselves down a few notches we can feel the warmth of community again.

Community is not agreeing on everything. It is to be in awe - in the midst of untangling our differences - of the inherent worth and beauty of every person. It is civility over manipulation, humility over intimidation, wonder over pride, service over conquest. It is taking joy in learning, putting love and truth above the narratives we treasure, and slowing down enough to be fully human with each other.

We are fortunate to be living in these times which compel us to find fresh vision. This is our moment to embrace and lean into the chaos, to create in our relationships and nation a "clean well-lighted place" where the American ideal, "Out of many, one," can take root and grow.

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