

Karen passed a news item to me this morning that has to do with churches and voting. According to the AP, the IRS has made a filing that seems to run counter to the 1954 Johnson Amendment, which says churches cannot endorse political candidates without losing their tax-exempt status. In the filing, the IRS says:

“Communications from a house of worship to its congregation in connection with religious services through its usual channels of communication on matters of faith do not run afoul of the Johnson Amendment as properly interpreted.”

That seems to mean that a pastor could endorse a candidate from the pulpit without jeopardizing the church’s tax exemptions. I’ve seen some speculation about what this could mean for future elections, but that’s all still speculative, so I’m not going to speculate further. It does suggest that, as a pastor, I can tell you who to vote for from the pulpit, and that is something that goes against all my training and my instincts. Pastors tend to be very influential people; after all, we are supposed to be representatives of God and Christ. That’s a serious responsibility, and one we should never get too comfortable with. I think a pastor should help people to understand their faith better, and should challenge them to seek justice, live kindness, and walk humbly. But all of that is to give people the resources they need to make faithful decisions.

The pastor’s job is not and should never be to make important decisions for parishioners. I firmly believe that Jesus wants us to grow up and be responsible for our own decisions.

As a church we exist in covenant with each other. That means we may not always agree, but that we have faith in each other to be the best, the most compassionate, and the most faithful we can be.

Blessings,

Rev. Matthew Baugh