



November 11, 2024

**Faith Matters: Remember the Fifth of November
(Updated for 2024)**

As adults, some of us mistakenly recall childhood as a time of worry-free play and freedom from responsibility. If we have children or work with children or have ever been children, we realize that these young people have very serious concerns, and some are hungry or abused, ill, ignored, or endangered. Even the most observably idyllic childhood is full of troubles, challenges, and fears.

Some childhood worries relate to developmental stages: Too young to understand relative size and mass, my younger brother feared slipping down the drain with the bath water. Other worries of children relate to real or perceived abilities and inabilities: I recall staying after class in third grade to copy from the board what I was embarrassed to admit that I could not see. A couple of years later, I could not walk across a balance beam, and as I watched other girls do cartwheels on it, I feared the inevitable ridicule when it would be my turn.

Children also absorb the serious concerns of the adults around them. I was a child of the 1950s and the Cold War, and in 1959, my father asked for my opinion when he considered taking a job in Lansing. I didn't think about how he honored me by even asking, but I thought over the issue and counseled that no, we should not move, because the larger city of Lansing would be so much more likely to be bombed than would Gladwin, Michigan, where we lived then. We did move, and one reason was to be closer to better hospitals for that younger brother, who had muscular dystrophy. When my brother was very ill the next year, my father asked me once if I wished I could be the one going to the hospital instead of my brother. I didn't immediately realize that my father, who would have willingly suffered for his children, presumed that he might expect the same selflessness from me. I thoughtlessly said no, absolutely not, no, I would not want to be sick instead of my brother. I don't think my father judged me at all, but I soon knew enough to feel a twinge of shame, if only in comparison to the example set by my father.

So here I am, in (advanced!) adulthood, and I write this on November 5, 2024. If we

were in England, we might think, “Remember, remember, the fifth of November,” with reference to Guy Fawkes Day and the narrow escape when King James I and Parliament could have been blown up in 1605 by a group of Catholic extremists, including Guy Fawkes, who was caught with the gunpowder. No, actually, on this November 5, much of the world is more likely to be attending to—and worrying about—Election Day in the U.S. Perhaps most of us are lucky to have that worry rather than acute physical or emotional pain, or the recent loss of a loved one, or rebuilding after the ravages of war or a devastating flood. But it’s a real worry.

Focus on the election often means stressing over it. Last Sunday, Rev. Margie referred to the prevalence of election-related stress. According to the American Psychological Association’s survey, 69 percent of Americans have found the election season to be highly stressful (Edwards and Martin). Bombarded by repetitive advertisements and text messages, dire predictions and unpredictable (unproductive) daily polls, high stakes and mean-spirited attacks, we have trouble sleeping or concentrating or planning holiday dinners for quarreling family members.

Two days later, after the election: I wonder again about the worries of children. How do parents and grandparents, teachers and pastors, talk with children about the election of 2024? Again, I think of my father and Lansing, Michigan, 1960. That was an election year, and he took me to downtown Lansing to listen to the candidate for whom he did not plan to vote. I remember that after the election, when he woke me up the next morning, he said that he had not voted for the person who had won but that both were good men. What a remarkable assertion! I am not thinking about whether my father was right or wrong, or whether his opinion would be supported by history—but what an attitude! How many people today can sincerely claim that there were two good candidates in 2024?

My father knew my nature, and if he had lived past 1974, he would not have been surprised to learn that he could not protect me from worrying for 50 more years. Many of us worry about what comes next, and we *pray* for our country, our leaders, our children. We know that we must take care of ourselves. Fortunately, our church also offers myriad possibilities for caring for others, and we are invited to think about those four *T* words that we read on the cork coaster: Time, Talent, Treasure, and Testimony. Contributing to church and community is the healthiest way of redirecting our worries.

Worried about what comes next and seeking explanations, we might be tempted to read every available election analysis, whereas it might be wiser to read somewhat less, or at least less about politics, just as we might do well to spend less time on cable television or social media. Of course we want to understand the forces explaining the election. For what it’s worth, the single article that has meant the most to me in recent (two!) days is reprinted in *The Atlantic* from the September, 2023, issue and so is not even specifically about the election: David Brooks’ “How America Got Mean” (Brooks). I had been thinking about the need for more and better education in the areas of American history and government, but Brooks suggests that a pervasive sadness and meanness in our culture is related to the neglect of *moral* or character education. He discusses increases in social isolation, “deaths of despair,” and depression, as well as a decline in social trust. He says we no longer emphasize the training of social skills and politeness, and we don’t encourage confrontation with the big questions of meaning, purpose, responsibility, and justice. Brooks says, “Over the past several years, people have sought to fill the moral vacuum with politics and tribalism. American society has become hyper-politicized...Politics overwhelms everything.” Even religious faith, he suggests, has been “subsumed” by politics—whereas faith ought to matter more than politics!

This is as far as I have progressed toward managing stress, understanding the

election, and considering what we should change for the sake of the next generations! All of us are works in progress, but I'm confident that faith matters and that this church provides the environment in which we can grow spiritually and intellectually, individually and collectively, so that we can make positive change.

~Written by Maurine Slaughter

Brooks, David. "How America Got Mean." *The Atlantic*. 14 August 2023.
<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2023/09/us-culture-moral-education-formation/674765/>.

Edwards, Erika and Martin, Patrick. "Election anxiety is real, no matter who you're voting for." NBC News. <https://www.nbcnews.com/health/health-news/election-stress-anxiety-sleep-tips-rcna177665>.

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