"You Can Count on That"
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The founding fathers have been getting a very bad wrap these last few days and tonight I am going to let them off the hook. The Electoral College was not the invention of men like, Madison, Franklin, Jefferson and Hamilton. Whether we blame or trumpet them for the current crisis in our nation, it is not their fault. The blame or celebrity for creating such a system of counting by district and region belongs to a different group of founding fathers, actually in point of fact it belongs to just one founding father, and I use the word 'father' very loosely here, the electoral college was God's idea, and Moses, Aaron and the heads of each of the 12 tribes were the election officials of their day, charged with making this system work, and work fairly. It may comfort you to know that even in biblical times it was not without its problems, although more than likely hat fact is no comfort at all.

In the very first chapter of the book of Numbers, the fourth book of the Torah, Moses is instructed by God to take a census of the people. God says to Moses, "Take a counting of the whole Israelite community by the clans of its ancestral houses, listing the names, every male, head by head. You and Aaron shall record them by their groups, from the age of twenty years and above. Take with you a man from each tribe, each one the head of his ancestral house. Those are the elected representatives of the assembly, the leaders of their ancestral tribes: they are the heads of the districts of Israel. So Moses and Aaron took those men, who were designated by name, and on the first day of the second month they assembled the whole community, and registered them by the clans of their ancestral houses.

This biblical census was one of many in the Hebrew Bible, but it stands out among all the others, because it was the first one to use a system of counting that

involved breaking people into groups, placing leaders over them and then counting everyone simultaneously. Previously, and on a few occasions afterwards all counting had been done by assembly the people and counting their heads one by one as they passed by the tent of meeting. A time consuming and unruly task, that was prone to error and turmoil. But this census was done differently, because it was considered of the highest importance to get the most accurate count of the people, as they were preparing to assemble and army and go to battle. Every person counted and therefore every person needed to be counted in the most efficient and accurate way possible.

What troubles me most about the current political debate in our country is not who will ultimately win or loose, but the relative easy at which some would deny any individual his or her constitutional right to be counted accurately. For it represents, I think a far greater concern and a far more prevalent attitude in our country than just this issue of the election. I worry that what is really being said by those who would like to see the recounting ended before it is concluded, and I make no distinctions of party affiliation here, I think the tone of this past election is evidence enough that if the results had been reversed, so would the arguments of the respective parties. But what troubles me most is what it says about us as a nation. So quick to rush to judgment, more interested in getting it over, than getting it right. I worry that what is really being said in the midst of all of this, is that individuals don't really matter, and that its okay to step on some people's rights, as long as you don't step on most of the people's rights.

But that is not what our tradition says, in fact, Judaism has a far different standard, and it is on the basis of this other standard that God loves the Jewish people.

The Rabbis of the Talmud assert that God loves the Jewish people. On what evidence do they know this, what is it that God loves so much about the Jewish people? They answer its is not that the Jewish people keep Shabbat, it is not that they go to Temple and prayer, its not that they build great houses of study and worship, its not even that they care for the sick and the hungry in their community. God likes all these things that his people do, but what he loves most of all, according to the rabbis, is that his people sit and argue for hours and days over the size of an olive, over the exact time of the sun setting or rising. They study and dedicate countless pages of legal text to the subtlest variations in the words of the Torah, the placement of a single letter in the sacred text; they question even the smallest punctuation mark. God loves the Jewish people not only because they observe the commandments, but so much the more so because they pay close attention to even the smallest details of those commandments. God loves the Jewish people because they have such great respect for the words of Torah, that every letter is treated as though it, and it alone was the whole Torah. When we say, that God is in the details, according to Jewish tradition nothing could be truer.

There is an obvious lesson in this rabbinic teaching for our country in the midst of our current political crisis, but far beyond the lessons for our country, the teaching is a lesson for our congregation as well. The Talmud teaches that of the myriad of letters that make up a Torah, if even one single letter is left out, the entire Torah becomes unfit for use; like the letters of Torah, if one single soul is excluded from the people of Israel, God cannot dwell among them. The teaching is both powerful and direct, when you leave people out, or behind, you also leave out God.

We sit here on this Shabbat, among us the leaders of our congregation as our temple board prepares for a weekend of study and planning. We sit here occupied with the growing crisis, both political and moral, in our country, but I challenge us to see beyond that that crisis to the larger issue it represents. How we make sure that all the voices in our community are heard and accounted for. How will we make sure don't leave anyone out, leave anyone behind as we move forward to the exiting opportunities that present themselves both in our congregation and in our own lives?

There is one example of a census that was taken in the Bible, without God's blessing. King David did it without through planning and attention to detail. He went himself one by one through the people of Israel counting each one of them as he passed by. It took almost a year, and at the end of it he could not produce an accurate count. David's census failed because he did not trust his leaders to help him, and he did not have enough respect for the individuals in his community to involve them in the process.

Our nation and our congregation must apply a different standard, we must apply the standard of Moses and Aaron, we must work together with our leadership to make sure that no one is left out or back, that everyone counts and that every voice is heard in a timely an efficient manner. The answer is not to move fast or slow, but to proceed in a way that God can be part of the process, a way that worthy of the holiness and sanctity of the task, that treats our people, and their votes as we would the smallest letter of the Torah, as if they themselves could be the missing piece in the great puzzle of fairness, compassion and justice.