In the news in recent weeks has been the IRS ruling that they are overturning the Johnson Amendment, in place since 1954, which had banned churches and other nonprofit religious organizations from participating or intervening in any political campaign in support or opposition to any candidate, at the risk of losing their non-profit status. This included endorsing a candidate from the pulpit or a church contributing to a campaign. (Pastors have always been able to do so as private citizens, using their own money, as long as it’s clear that they’re not acting on behalf of the church.)

There are a couple of things to know about this: first, it has rarely been enforced – particularly when it comes to what happens on Sunday mornings, which the IRS has likened to a “family conversation.” In fact, only one church has lost its tax-exempt status due to a ruling under the Johnson Amendment: a church in New York in 1992, which openly campaigned against Bill Clinton for president, taking out newspaper ads opposing his candidacy.

Second, the IRS can’t unilaterally overturn this amendment. Congress would have to amend the tax code to overturn it.

But even if Congress were to overturn the Johnson Amendment, I don’t think it would drastically alter the course of American religious life overnight. We already see a fair amount of issues-oriented political maneuvering, particularly from the right. This is part of what has made movements like the “right to life” movement so successful: their ability and willingness to harness the numbers and commitment of the so-called Evangelical movement. But by and large, people don’t like to be told from the pulpit who to vote for. (Or at least they say they don’t like to be told.)

Even if it did, I still wouldn’t tell you who to vote for. That’s not my role as your pastor. In my opinion, that shouldn’t be the role of any pastor.

As Lutherans, we believe that we have strong responsibilities when it comes our government and elected officials. In his sermon on the topic from 1523, Luther maintained that as Christians, we have a responsibility to our government. He wrote in the third part of his sermon *Temporal Authority: To What Extent It Should Be Obeyed*, “Now you will say, ‘If no one is to be trusted, how can land and people be governed?’ Answer: You are to take the risk of entrusting matters to others, but you are yourself to trust and rely upon God alone. You will certainly have to entrust duties to someone else and take a chance on [him], but you should trust [them] only as one who might fail you, whom you must continue to watch with unceasing vigilance.”

In other words, we have a responsibility to vote for the people that we believe, as Christians, will be the most faithful, the most responsible, in loving their neighbors as themselves in the fulfillment of their duties. We heard recently in Leviticus 19 just a few of the many people two whom this applies: the poor. Foreigners. Our neighbors. Hired hands. Deaf people. Blind people. The poor (again) and the great. Those whom we are angry with. Those whom we hold grudges against.

And then, it is our responsibility to hold them accountable. To watch them with “unceasing vigilance” in Luther’s words, and vote FOR them when they’re doing well, AGAINST them when we think someone else would do better.

But it isn’t my job to tell you who that is. As pastor, my role is to help you discern how your faith applies to the world around us. And then encourage and empower you to take it with you into the voting booth.