

July 24, 2016 at Advent Lutheran Church in Cedarburg, Wisconsin. 10th. Sunday after Pentecost. Luke 11:1-13. Persistence in prayer, the Lord's prayer.

QUESTION: I recently watched the commencement address at Stanford given by historian Ken Burns. Did any of you see that? It was excellent in its non-political assessment of politics today. Would anyone care to remark on how you feel about what is happening in our country today?

In our **second lesson** for today from **Colossians St. Paul** writes:

“See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the universe, and not according to Christ. For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have come to fullness in him, who is the head of every ruler and authority.”

What **St. Paul** is talking about is that your claim to be a **Christian**, and even more importantly someone **who believes in God** and especially the **essential message of Jesus** places you in a position that demands of you not to be **neutral** on issues that violate the very principals you claim to believe in!

We are talking about your right to privacy in your own home when the government has no business deciding whom you can love, live with or marry. Or if and when you go to church, what you believe in or whether you believe nothing at all.

We are talking about the breakdown of our American society in relation to each other, our long held values of liberty for all, and our disdain for anyone who dares think differently than we do.

If you think this conversation has no place in a Christian Church I would remind us of what happened in Germany with the rise of Fascism and the eventual Holocaust that no one was able to predict and in hindsight were horrified. Those within the Christian community who did speak out like Pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer were arrested, charged and hanged for speaking against the evil and supporting a plot to kill Hitler.

I recently saw a post on the **E.L.C.A. Facebook** post that defined the difference between **Americanism**, which is really a civil religion of its own, and **Christianity**,

which owes its **political allegiance to no one save God**. We have a tendency to **confuse the two** to the detriment of **both**.

Americanism: a type of idolatry. American Civil Religion. Code word for survival of the strong; disregard for the "weak" or any deemed "inferior": foreigners, people of color, Mexicans, Blacks, LGBTQ, Muslims, followers other than those of capitalistic Christianity (prosperity gospel), etc. Similar to Hitler's National Socialism, liquidating the "weak" to make a stronger nation.

Christianity: following Christ, the God revealed of love, with regard for the weak, the outcast, the disregarded, the foreigner, those deemed inferior, recognizing God works through the weak to shame the strong and all glory is to be given to God and the gift of righteousness and sanctification. 1 Corinthians 1:26ff

David McCullough is an American author, narrator, historian, and lecturer. He is a two-time winner of the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award and a recipient of the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the United States' highest civilian award.

Commenting on our current political situation he recently wrote:

“It’s up to all of us, all of us – Republicans, Democrats, independents, young and old – no matter the blaring show business and the blather of campaign politics, let’s pause and think and think carefully. This far-reaching and all-important choice of leadership is ours to make. We will be held responsible. How will history judge us?”

If you think this is an overreaction I would remind you that a while ago I mentioned a piece of American history that many people do not know about, and would rather not admit to. In **1934** our nation could very well have had a **Coup d’état** as a growing number of very **powerful American businessmen** became disillusioned with **President Roosevelt** and his **New Deal** that many now understand actually saved our nation at a critical time in our history.

It is astonishing to me that this true story has been surprised for so long, yet I am grateful that it is finally being told. This fall I would like to have a study of this book and how we must all work together with mutual respect regardless of politics to see that it never happens again.

See if this sounds familiar:

“Continuing his tour for the V.F.W., Butler observed more and more storm signals flying in the United States as he travelled around the country. The nation was rapidly becoming polarized between the forces of Left and Fright. Demagogues with apparently inexhaustible funds for propaganda and agitation led ‘Patriotic’ crusades against Communists, Jews, and ‘Jewish bankers,’ who were allegedly behind the New Deal.”

Replace the word Jews with Islamic terrorists and liberal socialists and you have a pretty close parallel to what some politicians say about the current state of affairs in the United States.

Historian **Ken Burns** closed his commencement address with these words:

“This is not A LIBERAL OR CONSERVATIVE ISSUE, A RED STATE, BLUE STATE DIVIDE. This is an American issue... We must remain committed to the kindness and community that are the hallmarks of civilization and reject the troubling, unfiltered Tourette’s of his tribalism.”

The truth is, we, both Democrats and Republicans are being **played like a fiddle** by whoever is **really calling the shots** for **both parties**, first of causing us to hate and fight one another, and then to put us in a position to accept the **lesser of two evils**. That is not what the founding fathers had in mind.

As Christians we have a moral responsibility to raise above partisan politics and reject the judgmental, cruel, offensive, and outright lying behavior that our political process has once again descended into regardless of your political leanings or party affiliation.

Last Wednesday I went down to **Cross Lutheran Church** with our **Advent team** to serve lunch to the homeless. I was asked to lead the Bible Study after lunch for mostly as **Easter** puts it, **“the poorest of the poor, Milwaukee’s most desperate.”**

I was humbled by their kindness and refusal to either complain or get angry, and moved by their desperate need for friendship, hope and encouragement.

One, obviously poor and perhaps homeless man said: **“I’m afraid a lot of our young people have their faces buried in technology, smart phones and games, we need to talk to one another, embrace one another as human beings.”**

Another black man stood up and said: “Things are more complicated than they seem, I respect the police, it is their job to protect us!”

And then there is Gwen, an older African American woman with sparkling eyes and the warmest smile I have seen in quite a while. She is a regular volunteer at Bread of Healing, and as we talked about many things I asked if she was a member of Cross, **“Oh no,”** she said. **“I am a member of the Nation of Islam.”**

Further conversation revealed that her father was a Pastor of an **African Methodist Episcopal Church** for many years in **Racine**. I knew **Pastor Davis** when I served in **Racine**. **Gwen** will be coming to visit us in the Fall to tell how this child of God and daughter of a **Christian** pastor became a **Muslim**.

And just as I was preparing my message for today, one of our members, **Ellie Anderson** posted a quote from Catholic author and theologian **Henri Nouwen** with whose wise and healing words I close:

“To become neighbors is to bridge the gap between people. As long as there is distance between us and we cannot look in each other’s eyes, all sorts of false ideas and images arise. We give them names, make jokes about them, cover them with our prejudices, and avoid direct contact. We think of them as enemies. We forget that they love as we love, care for their children as we care for ours, become sick and die as we do. We forget that they are our brothers and sisters and treat them as objects that can be destroyed at will.

Only when we have the courage to cross the street and look in one another’s eyes can we see there that we are children of the same God and members of the same human family.”

AMEN.