

One Nation Under God Sermon--June 28, 2020

"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." Those words come from our U.S. Constitution. In his Gettysburg Address President Abraham Lincoln referred to our country as a nation "under God." The Pledge of Allegiance includes the words "one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all."

"All men are created equal," "One Nation Under God," "liberty and justice for all"--the reality is that our nation is deeply divided and those divisions exist because we, Christians also, are not living under God as we should.

As we approach our country's Independence Day this coming Saturday, the 4th of July, we are going to be hearing lots of voices proposing solutions to the problems we now experience in our country. It is very important, then, that we as the people of God first hear what He has to say. Pastor Tony Evans has rightly said, "There are two answers to every question: God's answer and everybody else's. And everybody else is wrong when they disagree with Him. . . . If God is your problem, politics is not your solution. If God is your problem, social action is not your solution." He's right. We need to hear what God has to say and live as God's people.

The text and general outline of the sermon today come from an interview of Roland Warren the President and CEO of Care Net, a pro-life organization. The text is Joshua 5:13-14, "Joshua . . . lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, a Man was standing before him with His drawn sword in His hand. And Joshua went to Him and said to Him, 'Are you for us, or for our adversaries?' And He said, 'No; but I am the Commander of the army of the LORD. Now I have come.' And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped and said to Him, 'What does my Lord say to His servant?'"

Joshua is leading God's people as they are about to enter the Promised Land to take possession of it. It is clear from the context that the "Man" who stood before Joshua was the Lord Himself! But what kind of answer was this to

Joshua's question: "Are You for us or for our enemies?" What kind of an answer is "No!"? The question Joshua was asking of the Lord was actually the question the Lord was asking of him! The Lord was asking Joshua "Are you on My side?"

In view of all of the racial unrest in our country, we are being confronted with the questions "Are you for Black Lives Matter" or are you for "All Lives Matter"? "Are you for the Republicans or for the Democrats?" Roland Warren says, there is a third way—the right way. The particular question we should be asking as Christians is not the question the culture is asking. The question we Christians should be asking is "Am I on God's side as I think about and respond to this issue?"

What is God's side? God's side is the side of justice. We are to seek God's justice to make things "just". Justice is an attribute of God. Our Lord God, our Creator, is just and He demands that justice be a part of our character. Justice is fairness. Justice is equal treatment of all people, no matter their skin color or ethnic origin. All people, no matter their skin color or ethnic origin, are all descended from Adam and Eve. The variations in people were all in their genetic make-up. In the Bible wise men think and speak justice (Prov. 12:5, Ps. 37:30) for all people, God requires that we "do justice" (Mic. 6:8) and godly judges employ justice as they judge. That means God wants laws and judgments especially to protect the vulnerable. To be under God as a person of faith is to be on the side of justice.

At the same time, to be on God's side as a person of faith is to be a person of mercy. We are to love mercy. God is merciful. God's tender mercy toward us is rooted in His freely given, undeserved love and grace. David confesses his sin and pleads with God in Psalm 51:1, "Have **mercy** on me, O God, according to Your steadfast love; according to Your abundant **mercy** blot out my transgressions." Having received great mercy, we are to be merciful and forgive those who have sinned against us. Jesus taught us, "Be merciful, even as your [heavenly] Father is merciful" (Luke 6:36).

Thank God that He has been merciful toward us! We have all fallen far short of God's requirement that we live justly. We have sinned both by what we have done and by what we have left undone. In terms of the racial divides

of our country, we must all examine our hearts to see what we have done-- how our thinking and speaking and actions have been racist, and we have also fallen far short—we have left so much undone--to help bring about what is just and fair for all.

Yes, thank God He is merciful for He forgives all our sins, also our sins of injustice toward others. Out of His unfailing love He sent Jesus to die for our sins and for the sins of all people—no matter what the color of their skin and no matter what they have done. God is merciful and He forgives all who turn to Him in repentance and faith.

As citizens of God's kingdom and as citizens of this country, to be one people under God, we now approach the racial divides in our country with both justice—what is right—and mercy—forgiveness. We are to be forgiving and to pursue what is fair for all people.

A good place to begin is to listen carefully and compassionately to the stories of people who have experienced oppression. In many cases people feel oppressed because they have been oppressed under a system that has not been equitable—has not fostered “justice for all.”

Here's an example from the study, “One Nation Under God—Healing Racial Divides in America” by Pastor Keith Haney, an African-American Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod Pastor. Pastor Haney begins with this illustration, “I found myself watching a segment of the Bill O'Reilly show one night after another black man was shot by the police, this time in Charlotte. A civil rights attorney was his guest. As they discussed the events of the shooting, Mr. O'Reilly commented that we have to trust the information from the police. This comment really struck me. In one simple phrase, he exposed the heart of the problem between blacks and whites in America. There is a white America and a black America, with a huge racial divide between the two.

“White America starts with the viewpoint that all cops are honest, telling us the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. There certainly may be one or two bad cops out there, but by and large we can trust the police. That is white America's reality, its starting point. Everyone should believe the police, no one has a reason not to. That makes sense if most of your encounters with police have been fair and reasonable. That is your reality.

“But what if your experiences with police have not turned out so positively? What if you know someone whose experience ended with horrifying results? As a black male, I was taught to be cautious, even afraid of the police. So when a law enforcement officer pulls me over (very rarely has that happened), my heart races and I am on edge not knowing how the whole thing will turn out. I am convinced both parties feel the uneasiness, and it is a recipe for disaster. Two people, both on edge, both afraid of each other. One has a deadly weapon, one is defenseless.”

Please understand this is the view of a black, law-abiding, Christian, man, but he knows he is judged by many only because of his skin color. He has a fear most of us have never known. As we listen to each other with compassion, we can begin to help one another.

The racial divides in America will only be healed as we live as under God. God wants us to approach our racial divides with both justice—with what is right—and mercy, with forgiveness. We need to listen carefully and compassionately. Seek to understand those who feel powerless and hopeless. You will feel be uncomfortable. Get comfortable with being uncomfortable. Nothing changes when we are comfortable.

Our speech needs to be good—not filled with suspicion, bigotry and hatred. Hateful speech breeds only more fear and distrust. We need to confess our sins when we have been part of the problem. Our actions need to be representative of Christ, seeking reconciliation, which includes working together to correct the legacy of past injustice.

Think, speak, and live as representatives of Jesus. Jesus did not notice nationality, color, or gender. Jesus saw people as individuals, people for whom He took time to stop and show love and mercy. “He died for all that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for Him who died for them and was raised again” (2 Cor. 5). Christ alone can tear down the racial walls and make peace. Christ lives in us. We are His ambassadors. Empowered by His grace, walking humbly with our God, we do justice and love mercy and we live as His representatives. In the name of Jesus. Amen.