

July 2, 2023, 4th Sunday after Trinity
Pastor Tom Olson; Minnesota Valley Free Lutheran Church

PRELUDE: Ruth Antal (Fugleberg Sing)

RESPONSIVE READING: Psalm 138

P: I will praise you, O LORD, with all my heart;

C: Before the "gods" I will sing your praise.

P: I will bow down toward your holy temple

C: And will praise your name

P: For your love and your faithfulness,

C: For you have exalted above all things
your name and your word.

P: When I called, you answered me;

C: You made me bold and stouthearted.

P: May all the kings of the earth praise you, O LORD,

C: When they hear the words of your mouth.

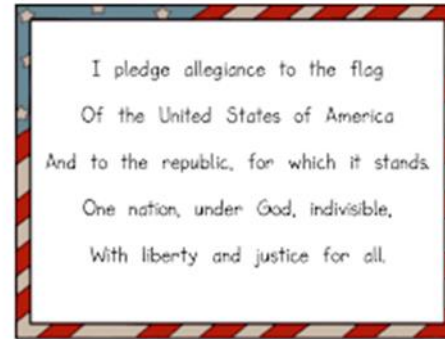
P: May they sing of the ways of the LORD,

C: For the glory of the LORD is great.

HYMN #629 (vss 1&4) "The Star-Spangled Banner"

CONFESSION OF SIN: Psalm 51:8-13 Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice. Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity. Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me. Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will turn back to you. Amen

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE



CHILDREN'S SERMON: The Visitation: John the Baptist's First Leap

READER: Bob Hawksford

OLD TESTAMENT LESSON: *Isaiah 11:1-5* A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. 2 The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him--the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD--3 and he will delight in the fear of the LORD. He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears; 4 but with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth. He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked. 5 Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist.

GOSPEL LESSON: *Luke 1:39-56*

39 At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, 40 where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth. 41 When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. 42 In a loud voice she exclaimed: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! 43 But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? 44 As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. 45 Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished!"

46 And Mary said:

*"My soul glorifies the Lord
47 and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
48 for he has been mindful
of the humble state of his servant.
From now on all generations will call me blessed,
49 for the Mighty One has done great things for me-
holy is his name.
50 His mercy extends to those who fear him,
from generation to generation.
51 He has performed mighty deeds with his arm;
he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.
52 He has brought down rulers from their thrones
but has lifted up the humble.
53 He has filled the hungry with good things
but has sent the rich away empty.
54 He has helped his servant Israel,
remembering to be merciful
55 to Abraham and his descendants forever,
even as he said to our fathers."*

56 Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months and then returned home.

READER: Here ends the reading of God's Word.
CONGREGATION SINGS: God be praised, for His glad Tidings!

CONFESSION OF FAITH: *I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, And of all things visible and invisible.*

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, Begotten of His Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, Very God of very God, Begotten, not made, Being of one substance with the Father, By whom all things were made; Who for us, and for our salvation, came down from heaven, And was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary, And was made man; And was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate, He suffered and was buried; And the third day He rose again according to the Scriptures, And ascended into heaven, And is

seated on the right hand of the Father, And He shall come again with glory to judge both the living and the dead; Whose kingdom shall have no end.

*And I believe in the Holy Spirit, The Lord and Giver of Life, Who proceeds from the Father and the Son, Who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified, Who spoke by the Prophets. And I believe one holy Christian and apostolic Church, I acknowledge one Baptism for the remission of sins. And I look for the Resurrection of the dead, And the Life of the world to come.
Amen*

GLORIA PATRI: Ambassador Hymnal p. 4 (please put on screen)
*Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost; As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen,
Amen.*

ANNOUNCEMENTS AND PRAYER

PRAISE SONGS: CHOSEN BY RUTH

SIX MARKS OF A CHRISTIAN NATION
Independence Day Sermon 7/2/23; Pastor Tom Olson

"Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen"

QUESTION: Here are some questions that we need to think about on this patriotic, Independence Day weekend: Is America a Christian nation? Has it ever been? What does a Christian nation look like? Romans 12 gives us a practical look at what it looks like when Jesus is Savior and Lord in our lives and as we grow in grace and maturity. It is a picture of true godliness. On this Independence Day season, let's look at SIX MARKS OF A CHRISTIAN NATION from Romans 12:9-16.

I. LOVE IS PARAMOUNT: A Christian nation is motivated by love.
Romans 12:9 Love must be sincere.

ROOT: The love of God in Christ is the root of our ethics. I get troubled when I hear our leaders say they must do what is in the best interest of the United States. What they often mean is this: “in the best interests of the people that finance their elections.” But what if what brings us great gain hurts people in other countries? Then it is wrong. A much better way to look at things is this, “We will do what is right and loving.” True Christianity is motivated by love, not financial gain.

ISRAEL: One of the reasons that Old Testament Israel failed was because they refused to bless other nations and only thought of themselves. God raised them up to be a blessing to all nations of the world. *Genesis 12:1&2 The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. 2 "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing...ALL THE PEOPLES ON THE EARTH WILL BE BLESSED THROUGH YOU"*

GOAL: A truly Christian nation is one that is a blessing to the entire earth. We won't exploit others, but we will help lift them up. As we do that, they will be generous with us. If we exploit others, we will be hated. Is our nation a blessing to or a hindrance for the other nations of the world? Are we lifting them up or are we stealing their resources? A CHRISTIAN NATION IS MOTIVATED BY LOVE.

II. EVIL IS ABHORED, GOOD IS TREASURED: A Christian nation is moral and good.

Romans 12:9b Hate what is evil; cling to what is good.

STANDARDS: A good and godly nation hates what is evil. A good and godly nation values what is good. A truly Christian nation has high standards of morality, honesty, modesty, integrity,

and decency...no time for debauchery, greed, killing, violence, abuse, laziness, dishonesty and Satanism.

CONTRAST: The other day we stopped at a berry patch run by Mennonites. The women all had modest dresses on and the men had simple, plain clothes as well. Modesty is part of their value system as Mennonites. In contrast, I went into Cub foods to pick up a couple of things and women had no modesty and men looked sloppy. The younger women didn't have much clothing on and the clothes they wore left nothing to the imagination. They were so skin tight and thin that you could see everything underneath. And I think that is the intention.

STUDY: I read a study that was recently taken of ordinary young American men who were trying to find a wife. What was amazing to me is the average American young man is not attracted to loose women. These men stated that they don't want a girlfriend who is covered with tattoos and piercings. They want a neat and modest girl. In fact, these young men stated that they find themselves very attracted to Amish and Mennonite girls! And the girls are the same way. They are looking for something they can't find, which is, a young man who is neat, well groomed, polite and kind.

DEBAUCHERY: The June gay pride month has revealed a dark side of our land. There are parades with people walking naked or in hideous costumes. Drag queens in one parade callously chanted, “We are coming for your children!” People are doing in public what should not even be done in private. Even a gathering at the White House with President Biden, who was praising these people, included all sorts of debased behavior and activity that would never have been imagined a decade ago. I am afraid that many of our leaders in business, government and even the church have surrendered to the dark side. We are in need of spiritual revival. I hope it is not too late. ***“Hate what is evil, cling to what is good.”*** A CHRISTIAN NATION IS MORAL AND GOOD.

III. PEOPLE CARE FOR EACH OTHER IN TIME OF NEED: A Christian nation is caring.

Romans 12:10 Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves.

FUNDRAISER: This is the way many decent small towns work when someone is in trouble. When Rebekah needed open heart surgery we could not afford, the rural community had a community fund raiser to help us with our bills. I love the line from the classic play, “The Music Man” where the song says that Iowa people are so stubborn that they “*can stand touching noses for a week at a time and never see eye to eye but they will give you their shirt and the back to go with it if your crop should happen to die.*” Our local church collaborative ministry called 360 Communities is trying to raise \$20,000 in July to help feed local families that are can’t afford food with the rising prices. A CHRISTIAN NATION is a place where neighbors CARE FOR EACH OTHER IN A TIME OF NEED.

IV. FAITH AND FELLOWSHIP ARE IMPORTANT: A Christian nation values the church.

Romans 12:11-13 Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. 12 Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. 13 Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

SUNDAY: Faith, hope, patience and hospitality are marks of a spiritually mature nation. I remember the time when businesses were closed on Sunday and nothing was scheduled in order to encourage people to be together in the house of the Lord. What was the end result? Most people in town didn’t know where the key to their house was. There was no crime. Sunday afternoon was a time for families to go to grandparents or neighbors to visit, play and have lunch together. It all flowed from a high view of the Word of God and the Lord’s Day. My mother would invite our

elderly widower neighbor, Anton Eggen over for some home cooked food. Today we are lucky to know who are neighbors are. It was a blessing to attend a block party that Joel and Hannah had a few years ago. People really enjoyed getting to know the people they had seen but never talked to. Many people are terribly lonely and we need to find ways to introduce them to ourselves and to the Lord. FAITH AND FELLOWSHIP ARE EXTREMELY IMPORTANT IN A CHRISTIAN NATION.

V. ENEMIES ARE CONQUERED WITH KINDNESS: A Christian nation doesn’t seek revenge.

Romans 12:14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. 15 Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.

TOXIC: I love the old saying, “Seek first to understand, then to be understood.” I was listening to a talk on KTIS about toxic people and they said that “people who have been deeply hurt without receiving the grace of God become people who hurt others.” They need lots of patient love.

GUARD: We read an interesting story in our devotions a few days ago about a Christian man who was imprisoned and beaten daily by an angry guard. One day the Christian prisoner said this to the guard, “If we are going to see each other every day, would it be possible for us to become friends?” and he held out his hand. The guard said, “That would be impossible,” as the Christian kept holding out his hand. Then the guard began to tremble and weep and he took the prisoner’s hand and said, “Yes, we can become friends.” That guard never beat that man again. The mean guard was conquered with kindness.

WEAPON: I have told before that if you want to kill your spouse that is OK under one condition, the weapon you use to kill them is KINDNESS. It is the only way to overcome abuse that you cannot escape from. A CHRISTIAN NATION IS KIND.

VI. NO ONE FEELS HE IS BETTER THAN ANOTHER: A Christian nation is humble.

Romans 12:16 Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.

HAUGHTY: I was talking with someone recently about a childhood friend who no longer would associate with her because this person no longer considered her to be important enough to be around. She only would associate with people who were of a higher class and consequently has very few friends.

FORD: I have found in my life that truly great people don't think like that. They are humble and treat all people well. Henry Ford wanted to hire a new engineer and he took the two candidates of equal education out to eat. At the end of the meal, he hired the one and dismissed the other. The one who was not hired said to Mr. Ford, "Could I ask you why you hired him and not me? We didn't even talk about engineering the whole meal." Henry Ford said, "You are both equally capable, but during the meal you treated me very well but you treaded the waitress very poorly. The other candidate treated the waitress as nice as he treated me. That is why I hired him."

COON VALLEY: In my home town there was no rich and poor section. The car dealer lived next door to the butcher. The store owner lived next door to a widow and a postal clerk. Another wealthy business man lived next door to a mechanic and across the street from a house painter. We all went to the same church and knelt at the same communion rail, equal before God, sinners saved by grace alone.

TRUMAN: After President Harry Truman retired, he and Bess returned to the old house in Missouri where they lived. They loved to take trips in their car, no security, no chauffeur, and stop in small

town restaurants and visit with the common folk. He loved the ordinary working-class Americans who put their faith in him. He never felt better than a farmer or a factory worker and you could feel it. The wealthy and powerful people despised him for it. Mrs. Roosevelt, an aristocrat, never even let the Trumans into the White House, even as Vice President to her husband. Truman was not good enough for her. But Harry Truman was a professing Christian who believed in the value of humility. The sixth mark of a Christian nation is that NO ONE FEELS BETTER THAN ANOTHER.

Are we acting like Christian nation? Have we ever been?

1. IS LOVE PARAMOUNT?
2. DO WE ABOHOR EVIL AND LOVE WHAT IS GOOD?
3. DO WE CARE FOR EACHOTHER?
4. ARE FAITH AND FELLOWSHIP IMPORTANT?
5. ARE WE HUMBLE?

This poem describes what happens when Jesus comes to a land and nation: *"When Jesus enters land and nation, And moves the people with His love, When yielding to His kind persuasion, Our hearts His truth and blessing prove, Then shall our life on earth be blessed, The peace of God on us shall rest. When Jesus comes, O blessed story! He works a change in heart and life; God's kingdom comes with pow'r and glory To young and old, to man and wife; Through sacrament and living word, Faith, hope and love are now conferred."* (Magnus Landstad 1802-1880)

Perhaps the best way to help our decaying country is to come to the Lord's table and receive faith, hope and love and go out from here to spread it to others. ***"Now may the peace of God that surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds through faith in Christ Jesus." Amen***

HYMN #541 "Lead On, O King Eternal"

HOLY COMMUNION

BENEDICTION: *“God Bless America” (I believe Ruth has the music...one time through chorus and go to second ending.)*

*God bless America, Land that I love.
Stand beside her, And guide her
Through the night, with the light from above.
From the mountains, To the prairies,
To the oceans, White with foam,
God bless America, My home, sweet home.
God bless America, My home, sweet home.*

POSTLUDE: Ruth Antal