

THE VINE



Pastor Kris' Chronicles

The Nation's Birthday

As we near our nation's 250th birthday, lots of grand patriotic celebrations and experiences are being planned. The following thoughts on patriotism are from a sermon I preached around the 4th of July a few years ago. It's a little long for a newsletter article, but I think it's worth repeating.

Patriotism is a good thing. Patriotism is love for your country. It's when you desire the well-being of your nation and its citizens. It's when you are willing to serve your country and work for its well-being. For some that's military service, but we can all serve our country through the everyday things we do in service to our neighbors and communities.

Patriotism is also when we celebrate the founders of the country and the ideals on which our country was founded – ideals of liberty and equality. I usually try to read the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution sometime around the 4th. On Independence Day, we celebrate the vision and wisdom of the authors of those founding documents.

It's our constitution that military members and those in other types of government service swear an oath to uphold and defend.

Patriotism is a good thing.

But patriotism has an evil cousin. Its name is nationalism. And in this country, it's most often manifested as Christian nationalism. Since it is mostly Christian nationalism, it is something we as Christians need to understand and confront.

So, what is nationalism? Essentially it's the belief that your own nation has a unique privileged status and is superior to other nations. Christian nationalism takes this even further – that privileged status is considered to be ordained by God. In order to confront Christian nationalism, it's important to be able to recognize it when you hear it or see it.

When sociologists and historians study Christian nationalism, there are several characteristics they list to define it. Those characteristics include the belief that:

- Documents like the constitution and Declaration of Independence are divinely inspired – like the Bible

- The success of the United States is God's plan and that the United States has a special role in God's plan. It may even go so far as to give the nation Messiah-like qualities or equate the US with the biblical Israel.

- The Federal government should formally declare the United States a Christian nation

- The Federal government should advocate Christian values...mostly the values that fall in a quite narrow range of personal morality and Christian male privilege and not so much the values Jesus taught.

- The Federal government should not enforce separation of church and state

- The Federal government should allow displays of Christian symbols in government spaces

- The Federal government should allow corporate prayer in schools

- It can also include a nearly blind willingness to follow often charismatic leaders who champion their beliefs about the unique privileged status of American Christians.

When you see pictures that show the American flag and the Bible, or the flag and the cross, that's Christian nationalism. It's not uncommon for a gun to also be shown – violence has always been an underpinning of Christian nationalism.

The God of Christian nationalism is not the God who died for the sake of all the world. The God who uniquely and preferentially blesses our nation is an idol. Christian nationalism is idolatry.

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Unlike what Jesus taught, nationalism always ends up being “over against” other groups – over against communists, socialists, atheists, Muslims, Jews, Blacks, gays, and so on.

And although in theory Christian nationalism wouldn’t have to be *white* Christian nationalism, study after study shows a troublingly strong correlation between Christian nationalism and white supremacy. Christian nationalists often equate the US to the Old Testament Israel. They forget that for 300 years of slavery and Jim Crow, we were Egypt, not Israel.

Patriotism is a way we can live out Jesus’ command to love our neighbor. Nationalism says our neighbors are a pretty exclusive bunch – that our neighbors are mainly limited to those who look and think like us.

There are places in scripture where it’s clear that we are to submit to government authority as a way to maintain order and a just society. But there are also places in scripture where government leaders are challenged and confronted – the prophets are among the most notable.

The prophet Amos was one of the clearest. Amos was a constant thorn in the side of Israel’s king. And he constantly butted heads with the priests who backed the king.

Israel had become essentially nationalist, although the Bible never uses that term. Israel’s rulers and religious elite assumed they had special status with God no matter what they did. But Israel’s status as God’s chosen was so that they could take God’s blessing to the whole world.

Amos spoke God’s anger and heartbreak to the rulers and religious leaders. He spoke against their mistreatment of the people they ruled, especially the poor and most vulnerable. He spoke against the rich who accumulated wealth at the expense of the poor. He spoke against the hollow religious rituals that continued, even though their way of life was from from what God desired.

In the end, God’s judgement came down on Israel – something its rulers thought could never happen. Christian nationalists often forget that part of the story, too.

During this national celebration, we look forward to honoring the work of the founders of our nation. It’s important to celebrate those who fought and died for independence. It’s important to celebrate those in our armed forces who continue to be willing to fight and die in defense of our nation.

But it’s also a good time to celebrate those whose life’s work and even actual lives were given to holding the nation to its promise of freedom and equality. From the very beginning, enslaved people of African descent and their free black and white allies challenged a government which allowed slavery to exist in a land founded on the ideals of liberty and equality.

Indigenous people challenged a nation who refused to even see them as fully human, even though that nation’s founding document said all were created equal and endowed with certain inalienable rights...rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

Over the next month or so, there will be lots of celebrations of our nation’s birthday. We’ll celebrate our values of life, liberty, and equality.

And even as we celebrate all the good that is this nation, we also pray that this nation will one day achieve its ideal of liberty and justice for all.

In Christ’s peace,

Pastor Kris



The Synod Council met on Friday May 29 before the start of the 2026 Synod Assembly. Along with our usual business of receiving reports from officers, we always get a report from Bishop Scott Johnson on overall Synod activities. One exciting item in his report was that there were 6 candidates entranced by the Candidacy Committee this spring. As most of us are aware, there is a shortage of ordained

ministers across the ELCA (and in other Christian denominations as well). It is wonderful that these 6 new people have discerned a call and with God's help will eventually become ordained.

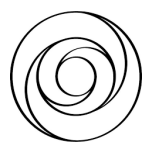
One happy responsibility of the Council is to give final approval for certifying Parish Ministry Associates (PMAs). In this case we approved 7 new PMAs for certification, including myself. The formal ceremony took place at the end of the closing Synod Assembly worship service and was a joyful celebration all around.

Members of some other Synod committees are also elected by the Synod Council, including Audit, Budget & Finance, and Candidacy. In particular, Virg Unverferth was elected to the Candidacy Committee and Mike Unverferth was elected to the Budget & Finance Committee.

As always, if anyone has questions about what the Synod or any of its committees do, feel free to ask, and if I don't know the answer I will always try to find out.

Seeking the Spirit by Virg Unverferth

Seeking the Spirit Within



Life is hard for so many different reasons including physical pains and limitations, emotional turmoil from loss or fear, psychological conditions brought on from trauma or biology, and spiritual anguish when we question our faith or where God is. Well. . . God is with us through it all. Sometimes we aren't aware of God because of all the "other" happening around us, but God is present with us through our souls and others. Our souls connect us to each other here on earth. . . and ultimately heaven.

Life is hard. As Christian people, we can strive to lessen some anguish by not using social media or our own voices to call people names, degrade them, point out their differences, or make it sound like they don't deserve to be here. We should support healthy dialogue with each other in order to reach new levels of knowledge and understanding. We are all God's Beloved and if we really look into our souls, that is what God wants us to do. God desires us to sit at a table with others, not put up walls to separate us. God is the Great healer.

Let The Healing Come
by Steve Charleston

Let the healing come, to every heart,
to every mind and body, to every life that needs it.
Let the forgiveness come, the release from what is past, the freedom of what is new.
Let the hope come to every person, to every family, that longs for an answer.
Let the light come, to every fearful corner, to every place of worry, to all the spaces that separate our souls.
Let the holy come, the simple pure love that heals and forgives, restores hope and enlightens our path.
Let the Spirit come, to do what we cannot do,
to make whole all that is broken.

Important information

Pastor Kris: phone 402-499-4993; krisbo90@gmail.com

Online worship info:

Bethlehem Facebook livestream <https://www.facebook.com/bethlehemdavey>

Zion Facebook livestream <https://www.facebook.com/ZionIthaca>

Grace Facebook livestream <https://www.facebook.com/gracelutheranwahoo>

Website: <https://www.vine4.org/>

Regular Sunday Worship Times

Bethlehem Lutheran—10:30 am—communion first and third Sundays

Czech Presbyterian—10:30 am—There will be no worship on the third Sundays from Easter to the beginning of Advent.

Grace Lutheran—9:00 am—communion second and fourth Sundays September—May; Second Sunday during the summer

Zion Lutheran—9:00 am—communion first Sundays

Pastor Kris preaches at Bethlehem and Zion the first and third Sundays and Grace and Czech Presbyterian the second and fourth Sundays. Fifth Sundays are a joint worship.

August 30 is the next 5th Sunday joint worship. I'll confirm with the Zion council but hopefully will be at Zion at 10:30

Preachers for May/June

July 5—Grace/CP—Miranda Kliment; B/Z—Pr. Kris

July 12—G/CP—Kevin Whitcomb; B/Z—Daryl Bohac

July 19—G—open; B/Z—Pr. Kris

July 26—G/CP—Pr. Kris; B/Z—Mike Unverferth

August 2—G/CP—open; B/Z—Pr. Kris

August 9—G/CP—Pr. Kris; B/Z—Megan Patent-Nygren

August 16—G—Kevin Whitcomb; B—Pr. Kris

August 23—G/CP—Pr. Kris; B/Z—Diane Sabatka-Rine

August 30—5th Sunday. Joint worship. I'll confirm with the Zion council but hopefully will be at Zion at 10:30