

Sermonnovember132016a

Hillsborough Reformed Church at Millstone

With this sermon I did something I have never done before in 42 years of ministry. I finished the sermon early Saturday and e-mailed it to the consistory. I do not use the pulpit for politics. I may address certain issues as is appropriate. But not partisan politics. I wanted to hear from the consistory if there were any objections whatsoever to what is in the sermon. There were no objections and I was encouraged by some of our leaders to preach this.¹

In 2008 I addressed the presidential election the Sunday after Barack Obama was elected. I did so because it was a critical moment in our history as Americans. Politics aside, we had elected the first African American to the highest office in the world. It was easy for me to be non-political. I simply quoted his opponent, John McCain< who in a gracious concession speech expressed his own disappointment at losing, but then heralded the importance of what our nation had done, politics aside, in electing an African American as our president.

Pastors must be non-political in the pulpit. And the remarks I will now make are unpolitical. I cannot stress that enough.

But this election was different for me as a Christian pastor than any in my 42 years of ministry. What made this different was when I opened my e-mail Wednesday morning to read a grief stricken e-mail asking how we could have elected such an immoral

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The sermon was very well received by the church and people found it helpful and calming in a tumultuous time.

person to the presidency. Through that morning, two more women came in teary eyed stunned that a man known for lack of moral compass could have been elected.

So I think it is important that I say something as a pastor of a church.

The first thing I should say is that in 2008 when Barack Obama won over John McCain, some of our members were happy, some disappointed. This is why minister cannot be political.

Likewise, in this 2016 election some of our members are happy with the outcome, the election of Donald Trump and the defeat of Hillary Clinton, and others are disappointed. If it were that simple, I would say nothing about the election and simply pray for the country.

But because of the depth of the despair of some in our church, I am compelled to say something.

Speaking first as a citizen of our great country, we have had a fair and honest election and by our system, President-elect Trump has won fair and square. There is no going back. This is our reality. And this – as good citizens, we must respect the decision of our country.

I am angered by the people on the internet, radio and TV who call our current president, Barack Obama, "Satan," an "idiot" or other derogatory names. He is our president and hence deserves respect. You can like him or not, agree or disagree with his positions on issues, even hate some of his positions, but he is our president and deserves our respect. I was taught that in ninth grade civics class in high school.

The same respect must be accorded Donald Trump. Certainly if our children find out about his moral lapses we should teach them that such talk and behavior is wrong.

And we do that as Christians.

But as Christians, the most important thing we should do is pray for our country and for our president and his cabinet, for our congress and courts.

That is the church's job whether we elect the most moral upstanding man or woman in the world, or the country's least moral person.

The Bible instructs us clearly to pray for those who govern us. As Americans we are free to work for or against policies we consider right or wrong, but we owe allegiance to our government and those elected to office and those appointed by those elected.

Praying for the person, not what they stand for or how they behave.

God can change anyone. If you think the current president elect is a bad man, pray for him. God can change any of us.

And I want us to be reminded of the main thing we believe as Christian people. The United States of America is not the kingdom of God. I think I speak for every one of our members when I say we love our country. We can love it, but we must always beware of turning nation into an idol.

In our song we ask – in prayer form – “God bless America.” That is fine. We also ask God to bless every nation in the world. All people everywhere.

The United States is “one nation UNDER God.” God is first. God’s kingdom lasts forever, this nation and every other is transitory.

For those afraid of what changes might happen in our government, I remind you of history. The church was not born into national sovereignty. Christianity came to be in a hopelessly weak subject backwater of the mighty Roman Empire. Jesus simply made Rome disappear. He acted as if it didn’t matter.² “Render unto Caesar the things that

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Cf. Mt. 10:28: “And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.”

are Caesar's," he said – about money, don't forget. "Render to God what is God's." And what is God's? You are. Your self. Your self does not belong to any nation. It belongs to God. As citizen you may pledge allegiance to your nation, but never lift the nation up to God's place.

Be a good citizen. Work for what you believe our country should do. Pray that our best and highest ideals are preserved for the rest of the world to emulate. Work for policies and positions that reflect the Bible teachings. We all want that. But never be American first. Always be a disciple of Jesus first.

I hope this election reminds us all of that.

I was visiting an older woman in our church last week, one of our previously installed elders, the week before the election. She and I are at opposite ends of the political spectrum. We did not talk politics, but then she brought up the election and said this to me. And what she said was wise and right and Christian. She said, "Fred, never forget that God is in charge." She said that because she was afraid the candidate I preferred would be elected. She believed that that person would be worst for our country. I was worried the opponent whom she supported would win.

And so it is that we do not all see eye to eye on who should lead our country. But we should all see eye to eye on who leads our lives and our church – not Hillary Clinton, nor Donald Trump. Nor Mitt Romney, nor Barack Obama. But Jesus Christ.

Who is your only comfort in life and in death? Not Donald Trump, not Hillary Clinton, not the Republican party, not the Democratic party,

My only comfort in life and in death is

That I am not my own, but belong—body and soul, in life and in death—to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ.

He has fully paid for all my sins with his precious blood, and has set me free from the tyranny of the devil. He also watches over me in such a way that not a hair can fall from my head without the will of my Father in heaven; in fact, all things must work together for my salvation.

Because I belong to him, Christ, by his Holy Spirit, assures me of eternal life and makes me wholeheartedly willing and ready from now on to live for him. (The Heidelberg Catechism, Question One)

These are not mere words, they are what gives us confidence in the future. (By the way, I chose this sermon title, Confidence for the Future before I knew the outcome of the election) The psalms say,

¹God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

²Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change, though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea;

³though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble with its tumult. Selah

⁵God is in the midst of the city; it shall not be moved; God will help it when the morning dawns.

⁶The nations are in an uproar, the kingdoms totter; he utters his voice, the earth melts.

⁷The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah (Ps. 46)

Nothing changed on Tuesday. God is still God. God is still in charge. We still have work to do – as the church, and as Americans. We say great words, “with liberty and justice for all.” Nothing has changed, we are still to work for and promote the good of everyone, to make sure every person in this country is treated equally, with the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness and to strive in the words of one of our beloved great presidents (A. Lincoln), “that we therefore highly resolve that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom—and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.”

And in the words of a man, now greatly admired but who in his day made many fearful with his movement, Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr.

“But there is something that I must say to my people, who stand on the warm threshold which leads into the palace of justice: In the process of gaining our rightful place, we must not be guilty of wrongful deeds. Let us not seek to satisfy our thirst for freedom by drinking from the cup of bitterness and hatred. We must forever conduct our struggle on the high plane of dignity and discipline. We must not allow our creative protest to degenerate into physical violence. Again and again, we must rise to the majestic heights of meeting physical force with soul force.”

“I have a *dream* today!”

“I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, and every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight; ‘and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed and all flesh shall see it together.’”

“This is our hope, and this is the faith that I go back to the South with.”

“With this faith, we will be able to hew out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope. With this faith, we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood. With this faith, we will be able to work together, to pray together, to struggle together, to go to jail together, to stand up for freedom together, knowing that we will be free one day.”

“And this will be the day -- this will be the day when all of God's children will be able to sing with new meaning:

‘My country 'tis of thee, sweet land of liberty, of thee I sing.

Land where my fathers died, land of the Pilgrim's pride,

From every mountainside, let freedom ring! ‘

“And if America is to be a great nation, this must become true.”

Martin Luther King said this quoting apocalyptic passages (the word “apocalyptic” means “a revelation” or “unveiling”) from the Bible. The lectionary (I did not choose the readings, they are the ones appointed in the three year cycle lectionary for churches) coincidentally called for two apocalyptic readings we heard this morning, from Isaiah about God’s restored creation and from Jesus about the destruction of Jerusalem – now THAT was cataclysmic!

So we end with this. For those who are glad Donald Trump was elected, he is not the savior. For those devastated at the results of the elections, this is not the end of the world. Nor do I believe it is the end of the republic.

We are all Americans, not Trumpians, not Clintonians – Americans – one nation UNDER GOD.

God is in charge, and that is why we can be confident in the future.

Isaiah 65:17-25

The Glorious New Creation

For I am about to create new heavens
and a new earth;
the former things shall not be remembered
or come to mind.
But be glad and rejoice for ever
in what I am creating;
for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy,
and its people as a delight.
I will rejoice in Jerusalem,
and delight in my people;
no more shall the sound of weeping be heard in it,
or the cry of distress.
No more shall there be in it
an infant that lives but a few days,
or an old person who does not live out a lifetime;
for one who dies at a hundred years will be considered a youth,
and one who falls short of a hundred will be considered accursed.
They shall build houses and inhabit them;
they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit.
They shall not build and another inhabit;
they shall not plant and another eat;
for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be,
and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands.
They shall not labor in vain,
or bear children for calamity;
for they shall be offspring blessed by the LORD—

and their descendants as well.
Before they call I will answer,
while they are yet speaking I will hear.
The wolf and the lamb shall feed together,
the lion shall eat straw like the ox;
but the serpent—its food shall be dust!
They shall not hurt or destroy
on all my holy mountain, says the LORD.

Luke 21:5-19

The Destruction of the Temple Foretold

When some were speaking about the temple, how it was adorned with beautiful stones and gifts dedicated to God, he said, 'As for these things that you see, the days will come when not one stone will be left upon another; all will be thrown down.'

Signs and Persecutions

They asked him, 'Teacher, when will this be, and what will be the sign that this is about to take place?' And he said, 'Beware that you are not led astray; for many will come in my name and say, "I am he!" and, "The time is near!" Do not go after them.

'When you hear of wars and insurrections, do not be terrified; for these things must take place first, but the end will not follow immediately.' Then he said to them, 'Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and plagues; and there will be dreadful portents and great signs from heaven.

'But before all this occurs, they will arrest you and persecute you; they will hand you over to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors because of my name. This will give you an opportunity

to testify. So make up your minds not to prepare your defense in advance; for I will give you words and a wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to withstand or contradict. You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, by relatives and friends; and they will put some of you to death. You will be hated by all because of my name. But not a hair of your head will perish. By your endurance you will gain your souls.