

Sermon for One Nation Under God Please: Pray,

Date: July 3, 2022

Location: St. John's Lutheran Church, Austin, MN

First Reading: Revelation 7:9-17

Epistle Reading: 2 Corinthians 5:11-21

Gospel Reading: Luke 10:25-37

Sermon Text: 2 Corinthians 5:11-21

Sermon Title: One Nation Under God: Pray

Introit: Psalm 133:1-3; Antiphon Psalm 133:1

Hymns:

LSB 965 – God Bless our Native Land

LSB 717 – Eternal Father, Strong to Save

LSB 744 – Amazing Grace

LSB 966 – Before you Lord, We Bow

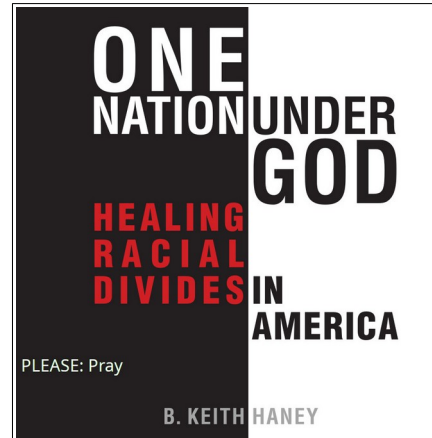
LSB 596 – All Christians Who Have Been
Baptized

LSB 618 – I Come O Savior, to Thy Table

LSB 597 – Water, Blood, and Spirit Crying

Liturgy:

Divine Service III, p. 184



Songs:

By Our Love

Healing Begins

Grant Peace We Pray

Sanctus: After All

Agnus Dei (MWS)

There was Jesus

Sweet Beulah Land

Liturgy:

Creative Worship



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Text: 2 Corinthians 5:11–21

Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others. But what we are is known to God, and I hope it is known also to your conscience. We are not commending ourselves to you again but giving you cause to boast about us, so that you may be able to answer those who boast about outward appearance and not about what is in the heart. For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.

From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

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

There is unrest in the forest
There is trouble with the trees
For the maples want more sunlight
And the oaks ignore their pleas

The trouble with the maples
(And they're quite convinced they're right)
They say the oaks are just too lofty
And they grab up all the light

Now the oaks can't help their feelings
If they like the way they're made
And they wonder why the maples
Can't be happy in their shade

There is trouble in the forest
And the creatures all have fled
As the maples scream, "Oppression!"
And the oaks just shake their heads

So the maples formed a union
And demanded equal rights
They say, "The oaks are just too greedy
We will make them give us light."

Now there's no more oak oppression
For they passed a noble law
And the trees are all kept equal
By hatchet, axe, and saw.

This is going to be a challenging few weeks for us as we work through some issues. Issues that are addressed by that poem.

We are going to start a Bible study, written by Pastor B. Keith Haney. I'm really thankful for the material he has put together. I hope by the end of this, you will be too. As we go through this it will, from time to time, shine a mirror on us. It will show us things that are not so good. That's what God's Word does. It cuts to our heart,¹ but it also gives peace to our heart.²



B. Keith Haney



In dealing with this "one nation under God," we have to realize we often think of the world in an "Us" vs "Them" frame of mind. It is so easy to buy into this "Us" vs "Them" propaganda because so much of it is in the news and the TV programs we watch.

Now here in Austin we should have a bit of an advantage. We should be able to see through the false divisions and propaganda better, because we are surrounded here by tens of nations, languages and tongues. You only need to walk through the aisles at Walmart or Hy-Vee and open your ears. Especially on a Sunday afternoon.



1 **Hebrew 4:12** – For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.
2 **Psalm 119:105** – Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

Just go for a walk, look and listen. You will hear many languages and see many different people from many different countries and cultures.

Now here is where that mirror, that second function of the Law,³ shows up that often reflects things we don't like to see. Is it true in you? Do we not often fail see them, or do we see them as a burden, blaming them for whatever troubles might come.



The “Them” come from countries around the world, from: Asia, Africa, Central and South America and Europe. Some come through the proper channels: as refugees (to save their lives), as immigrants (who applied, got in line, and their turn came up) or illegally by sneaking in under the wire or over the fence.

As we go through this sermon series I want to ask you a number of challenging questions. Questions that I want you to ponder. Here is the first one: What is the Church's role and responsibility: To all of “Them” and to all of “Us”?

The “Us” part of that question might seem easy. We are to share the Gospel, proclaim God's judgment against sin and shower the riches of God's grace on all of “Us” who repent.

The “Them” part might not be so easy. There is at times a language barrier so it's harder to talk with them. There are cultural differences and traditions that we do not share. They often don't come with not much stuff, but do come with much need, and their priorities are to maintain food, clothing and shelter, so church sometimes takes a back seat. ...and what about those who do not share our Christian faith? Will they hate us? (Like we see on TV all the time.) Will they get offended if we talk about Jesus? What if I really care and want be nice, should I avoid topics like religion? What about those who came here illegally? What is the Church's role and responsibility, to all of “Them.”

The Bible answers all of these questions:

What about those who do not share our Christian faith?

Jesus said: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”⁴

3 Martin Luther described the Law of God as having three functions: Curb, Mirror and Guide.

4 **Matthew 28:19-20**

Will they hate us?

Jesus said: “If the world hates you, know that it has hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.”⁵

Will they get offended if we talk about Jesus?

The Bible says: “I am not ashamed of the Gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.”⁶

What if I really care and want be nice, should I avoid topics like religion?

Jesus said: “Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers, and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.”⁷

What about those who came illegally? There’s a tough one! What about them? They don’t really have a right to be here. They, by a legal definition, are the “Them” the outsiders. What is the Church’s role and responsibility: To all of “Them” and To all of “Us”? How did Jesus treat outsiders like: Romans,⁸ Samaritans,⁹ etc.

The struggles we have is when we fail to see the “we” and “me.” To help, let me ask you another tough question:

How many races are there in the world? In this picture you see: Asian yellow, Indian brown, Norwegian White, Mexican Red,



5 **John 15:18-19**

6 **Romans 1:16**

7 **Matthew 13:40-43**

8 **Matthew 8:6-8,10** “Lord, my servant is lying paralyzed at home, suffering terribly.” 7 And Jesus said, “I will come and heal him.” But the centurion replied, “Lord, I am not worthy to have You come under my roof, but only say the word, and my servant will be healed...” When Jesus heard this, he marveled and said to those who followed Him, “Truly, I tell you, with no one in Israel have I found such faith.”

9 **John 4:1-42; John 8:1-11**

Sudanese Black, Italian Olive, Senegalese Blue... and there are so many many more.

How many races are there in the world? An evolutionary world view would teach us there are many. What does the Bible teach? Of all those different people groups (and there are many more) which ones are descendants of Adam and Eve? Which ones are descendants of Noah and his wife? How many races are there in the world? What does God's Word say?

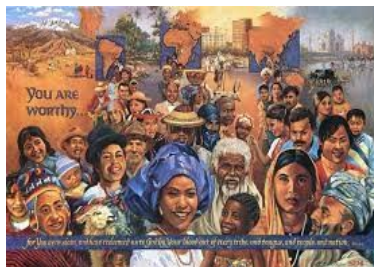


Adam and Eve Family Tree



I started this series, purposefully, the day before July 4, Independence Day, with this title: One Nation Under God.

That very phrase, in our American tradition, does promote an “Us” vs “Them” position. There are times when that’s good! Today we would all proclaim we are not Russian leadership. We are the good “Us.” They are the bad “Them.” However I want to you see the world, over these next few weeks, through Scripture spectacles, through Lutheran lenses. In those “glasses” who is the “One Nation under God?” What does the Bible say?



“I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, “Salvation

belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!¹⁰



When we start seeing the world like that, the “Them” becomes “We.” The “We” becomes “Us.” The Us” becomes “Me” right here, right now. When we fail to get this “Me” and “We” right, and fail understand where we all fit in God's kingdom, God's nation, we miss the mark. “Us” vs “Them” can be a problem.



I ran into this when I was in Scotland. We were at a little pub in Aberfeldy. We were enjoying some Haggis and other local foods and struck up a conversation with some local folks sitting near us. It was a fun conversation, but there was one comment that was made

10 Revelation 7:9-11

that has stuck in my mind. It was about when the conversation turn briefly to politics.

They commented on the U.S. president a the time who had not been in office too long. They thought it was a bad choice. They often perceived America as too powerful and too often pushing their weight around. They saw the world though “Us” vs “Them” lenses. Their perception was “all Americans think that way.” Do you all think the current president is the best? Do you all think the last president was the best? I doubt we could get a majority consensus on that in this room. Does that make us enemies who need to hate each other?

How about the police? There are different ways people view the police. For example, when I view the police I see them as those who “protect and serve” but there are other perceptions of them. Are “We” right and “They” wrong, or could we, should we, listen to their “why”?

If a police officer pulls me over my personally expectation is he come to speak to me and he is going to treat me fairly. In some places in our country there are people, law abiding, Church going, family-kind-of-people who live in terror of such an encounter.

Does that mean those people are bad? No. Does it mean those police are bad? No. Does that mean our nation is bad? No. Are there bad people? Yes. Are there bad police? Yes. Does that make us all a bad nation? No. It is the experience we have in our sin infected and sin affected world. Sin destroys our identity as human beings. It reduces us to “Us” vs “Them” and divides us. That division sometimes appears has hate, mistrust and fear, which is sometimes warranted because of what sin has done.

How many of you have considered, or maybe even done, a DNA test to see where your family lineage originates? I would guess mine would be interesting. You might feel the same. Have you considered there are some who might feel they don't want to know, because they don't want to look into how their family came to this continent, against their wishes.

How about community? Here's something I want you to understand. The differences in community. What if you live in a neighborhood where some of your neighbors are not the best people. The crime rate is high so businesses close. Your insurance on your home and car are triple or more what you'd pay in a better neighborhood. Because the businesses close there are no jobs. Even buying groceries is an expense because you have to drive an half-hour or 45-minutes to get to the nearest grocery store. In a car, on which you cannot afford the insurance and

with gas prices so high you can put gas in the tank if you're going to buy food. Food you can't get to because it is too far away.

Your answer to that might be, "So move." Which could be a good answer. Except those higher bills and lack of good jobs prevents you from saving money and because of where you live the banks won't loan you money for a mortgage. So you can't move.

Are there people in those neighborhoods who have "made their bad choices and now they have to sleep in mess they've made"? Yes. Are there people in those neighborhoods who are stuck and can't get out? Yes. Are they bad people too?

In those same neighborhoods parents might work hard, 16-hours a day 7-days a week, to give their children a chance to get out. They sacrifice a better life for themselves to give it to their children. They want them to go to school, to succeed, but even the schools can be part of the problem and prevent that.

I started out in college heading for a degree in education. I had an experience in my student teaching assignment, in an inner-city school, where I was teaching a class, and a formal complaint was filed against me and my supervisor/mentor because the kids were learning too much.

I'm not kidding. I was teaching a 4th grade class, and the 5th grade teacher filed a complaint because he would have to change his lessons because the kids were learning too much. You might think that teacher was told to help educate the kids. That is not what happened. I was told to stop teaching, or I would be failed on my student teaching experience. "You stop teaching those kids, or we're going to fail you." That would not happen in all schools. Why would it happen in any school?

Think about the division and the brokenness in communities. This whole thing changes a persons identity? The way somebody sees and lives these things leads to a loss of identity in two ways: One in our community living together, and the other in our Christian lives together.

Look at these numbers. These are from 2014 because those are the numbers Pastor Haney put in his book:

2014

White household average income \$71,300

Black household average income \$43,300

To which you might have some explanations, along the lines of opportunity and local culture, but look at this:

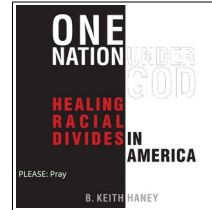
2014

White college-educated average income \$106,600

Black college-educated average income \$ 82,300

That is not the problem. That is a symptom of the brokenness sin brings to our world. What can we do? These issues are no doubt profoundly complex with many contributing factors. I don't want to minimize that or suggest the answer is simple. I just want you to see the brokenness among us.

We, as followers of Jesus, cannot fix this problem. You cannot fix it by being a better version of you. So what can we do? How can this get fixed? We can't do it. We can contribute to the problem, and too many do, but we can't fix it. Only Jesus can fix it. Jesus changes everything. Part of the brokenness we are experiencing as "one nation under God" is: the "under God" part is missing.



Jesus came to give us an identity. He said "You are the salt of the earth."¹¹ He didn't say that to non-believers. He said that to His followers. Jesus said, "You are the light of the world."¹²

If the world is going to see anything better it is going to be because "We" are a city set on a hill that cannot be hidden.¹³ Too often we hide behind these walls. Too often I tell people (even here on the North-West side) I'm at St. John's, and they have no idea where that is. Too often we hide behind these walls, letting the sin happen to the world instead of going out with the Ephesians 6 weapons, God has given us, to push Satan down and lift people up.

Jesus said:

Let your good deeds shine before others, so they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.¹⁴

The identity issue is not a "Them" and an "Us." It is a "We" and a "Me."

What would happen if God moved "Me" "We" and "Us" to start acting like "The light of the world?" What difference would people find here in these walls? People: Fellow citizens of America, but more important, fellow citizens in the household of God. What difference would people find here if we start acting like, we are the light of the world. What would that look like?

11 **Matthew 5:13**

12 **Matthew 5:14a**

13 **Matthew 5:14b**

14 **Matthew 5:16**

St. Paul says:

The love of Christ controls us, because ... One has died for all,... and He died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for Him who for their sake died and was raised.¹⁵

We are the people of God. God has chosen “Us” right here, right now. He has put us in this place for such a time as this.¹⁶ Let us live for Christ. Let us stop evaluating others from a human point of view. Just like at one point people saw Jesus as a human, then they realize this is God.¹⁷

This is the Savior of the world. This has changed everything. What if we stop looking at brothers and sisters in Christ as something other than brothers and sisters in Christ?

Anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new creation. All of this is from God.¹⁸

Let us see “Them” as not the problem, but our brothers and sisters in Christ. This means everyone who belongs to Christ has

... become a new creation.¹⁹

This isn't because we are good. It's because it is a gift from God.²⁰ Only God can make the change in “We” and “Me” necessary for healing to happen. St. Paul said it this way:

We know that our old self was crucified with Him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin.²¹

We are dead to the power of sin, and alive to God through Jesus Christ. That is the way it should look among us. Sin should not control the way we live. We do not give in to our sinful thought. We give ourselves completely to God. Why? Because we were dead, eternally to God, but now we are alive eternally to God.

15 **1 Corinthians 5:14-15**

16 **Esther 4:14** – If you keep silent at this time, relief and deliverance will rise ...from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?

17 **2 Corinthians 5:15** (*Paraphrased*)

18 **2 Corinthians 5:17**

19 **2 Corinthians 5:17**

20 **Ephesians 2:8-9** – By grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

21 **Romans 6:6**

Sin is no longer our master. We no longer live under the requirements of the Law. Instead, we live under the freedom of God's Gospel grace.²² Everyone needs that freedom. In that light there is no "Us" and "Them." There is only "We" One Nation under God.

Only God can make that change, that healing. It means you can't pretend to love "Them." You'll have to really love "Them" like "Us." It means you will have to get outside your comfort zone. It means hate what is wrong. Hold tightly to what is good. You have to love each other with genuine affection.²³ That means lift others up and see them the same as you. You don't look down on someone unless you are going to pick them up.

Here's the hard part to see sometimes. Everyone in Austin, MN is the same as you. We are all sinful lost people in need of forgiveness which comes only on the vehicle of repentance. It comes only in Jesus. We all need to be covered with the Blood of the Lamb. We need that grace, that "Amazing grace that saved a wretch like me." It might be a challenge for some, but work hard to serve the Lord enthusiastically. Be patient. Keep on praying. When God's people are in need be ready to help.

Then bless those who persecute you, don't curse them. Pray that God will bless them live in harmony with each other. Don't be too proud to enjoy the company of ordinary people and don't think, you know, it all never pay back.²⁴

Do things in such a way that people see in you honor in all that you do. Don't let evil conquer you but conquer evil by doing good.²⁵

The Church has not stood strong enough in God's love to heal this divide. This divide can be healed because God heals it with that ultimate good which He did for us all. Let us love people in Jesus because Jesus changes everything. Pray that the Lord of the harvest would help us be a part of that healing.

Amen.

22 **Romans 6:14**

23 **Romans 12:9-10** – Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor.

24 **Romans 12:14-19**

25 **Romans 12:21**

**Proclaim God's Word,
Encourage one another in faith,
Witness to God's love and
Serve all people**

