

**THE NAME ABOVE ALL NAMES; PHILIPPIANS 2:5-11; CHRIST THE KING/  
11.20.16; THOMAS H. YORTY; WESTMINSTER PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

Last Sunday, on our annual pledge dedication Sunday I made some comments about the recent election and the moral courage and vision churches, *this church* will be called upon to summon in the days ahead.

The rhetoric of the campaign revealed less about policy than it did about personal character and the blatant disregard by the president-elect for women and a long list of minorities including veterans and disabled persons.

That hateful rhetoric is now being translated into the governing structure of the new administration with the appointment of senior advisors and agency directors who will chart the course of the nation.

Given the proud alignment of these advisors with white supremacist nationalism and xenophobia that brands whole groups like Muslims, Mexicans and African Americans as dangerous criminals and worse – I want to devote some time this morning to reflect on our role with regard to the new president and his aim to redefine America. I do not remember in my lifetime or the past century such unabashed racism, misogyny and Arian ideology in a soon to be sitting president.

Here is a short list of some of the items on his agenda: the dismantling of Medicare and approval for the Keystone Pipeline—issues about which I grant reasonable people might disagree, but then there is the proposed the mass incarceration and deportation of Mexicans; the registration of all Muslims; the transfer of protected federal lands for commercial use and mining; backing out of the Paris climate accords; exposing our NATO partners in the Baltic to Russian annexation; and nullification of the Iran nuclear agreement opening the door to renewed efforts in Iran to build nuclear arms.

Since the levers of control in possession of the new administration include a GOP majority congress, the likely appointment of at least two Supreme Court justices and two thirds of state governorships and legislatures this agenda could be quickly enacted.

We are well beyond talk about ‘wait and see’ or ‘give the president-elect the benefit of the doubt.’ He has crossed a moral/ethical and political line that violates the principles of our faith expressed by Jesus in the greatest commandment and in the Bill of Rights and in the spirit of the Declaration of Independence.

This past week Jon Stewart made a poignant observation. He said the country hasn’t changed from the country it was two weeks ago. The nation after the election is the same America as it was before the election. The nation that elected Barack Obama is the same nation that elected Donald Trump – we have all of the grace and strength, all of the flaws and volatility, all of the insecurity and resilience on November 20<sup>th</sup> that we had on November 7<sup>th</sup>.

What makes America special, indeed what makes America great is that we are the first people to conduct an experiment in multi-cultural democracy. Two hundred and forty years later, with few exceptions, we can say that experiment has been a success.<sup>i</sup>

America is not natural. Tribalism is natural. Democracy is not natural. Warlords and dictators are natural. Democracy takes work. Pluralism takes brave and visionary leadership – its goes against the grain of thousands of years of history.

America is the exception and is exceptional because we forged freedoms in the crucible of our War of Independence and fought and died for those freedoms against the forces of darkness – forces that have reared-up again.

It is Christ the King Sunday. I did not plan on preaching on what appears to be our soon to be endangered rights and freedoms or the appointments of the president-elect. It is hard to identify a time when so many of the essential operating principles and core values of our democracy have been challenged not just by incendiary rhetoric but now by the appointment to positions of formidable power individuals who espouse views that until ten days ago were considered marginal at best. What seems in danger of taking hold, if it has not already, is a broad-based malevolent, fearful, potentially violent turning, not just inward, but against one another. So we need to talk today, as a church.

Of course, to continue to speak out about such things after a vicious and mind numbing campaign runs the risk of inducing ‘resistance fatigue’ before the new president is even sworn-in.

This is not unlike the dilemma the press and media face by exposing fake news – like the claim recently in a tweet by the president-elect that the NYT is losing thousands of customers because of bad reporting and that they sent a letter of apology to their subscribers for their faulty reporting when in fact subscriptions have skyrocketed and no letter of apology was sent to anyone.

What all the fact checking and exposing of falsehood does on the one hand is keep the record straight but on the other hand it erodes trust in real reporting. Couple that with the president-elect’s hostility to and disdain for the press and his forbidding access to those reporters and news agencies who criticize him and the role of the press in this free society is severely hampered.

Many of us would prefer to discover that this is all a bad dream and that we will soon wake up. We are tired of talking about the newest revelation of hard line proposals and appointments. We have a rule in our house. We do not talk about the election or the coming administration at the dinner table.

But we cannot afford to ignore signs of what appears to be an emerging fascism or white nationalism or militant Christianity or some combination of all of the above.

Here’s what some of the newly appointed leaders think: Steven Bannon, senior strategic advisor and the most influential voice in the new regime said in a statement less than two years ago, “we are at the beginning of a very brutal and bloody conflict”; Michael Flynn, proposed national security advisor: “Islam is no more than a political ideology”; and Jeff Sessions, proposed Attorney General who publically endorsed the KKK years ago which lost him an appointed judgeship.<sup>ii</sup>

The racism embodied in these comments and these men is undeniable. Roger Cohen, yesterday, suggested that the cabal that is forming in what will be the new White House is proposing the restoration of the Judeo-Christian West against what senior strategic advisor to the president, Steve Bannon, calls the 'new barbarity' – the progressive/liberal elites who have rigged the system.

These elites, Bannon believes, have diluted Judeo-Christian values in rampant secularization, migration, race-mixing, irreligious embrace of same-sex marriage, radical feminism, euthanasia, and choose your gender bathrooms.

In addition, the mass 21<sup>st</sup> century influx of Muslims in the West may be equated with the mass emancipation and emergence from the shtetl of Jews in 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe, and were blamed as disruptive, threatening, and a menace to the established order. Barak Obama is of mixed race. Who better to symbolize the looming decadence? Instead of "Make America Great Again" read "Make America White Again."<sup>iii</sup> The president-elect manipulated racism and sexism to a shrinking white Christian population to his great advantage, often repeating at his rallies, "I am your last chance."

What then to do in this strange calm before the storm while the Trump team takes shape, yet life seems to proceed as usual? Of course, people of color and immigrants – the canaries in the mineshaft – are preparing for the worst.

The words that come to mind as we process what the new political reality might mean are 'vigilant watchfulness' and 'a grassroots effort to meet and understand those we disagree with who voted for the GOP candidate.'

Local communities have incredible strength if they join in common cause. To do that effectively we have a lot of ground to make up; we have been living in echo chambers too long with our on-line, self-reinforcing opinion and media feeds. This is precisely what is difficult about a multi-cultural democracy, especially now. It takes dialogue, trial and error, activism, and endurance. One week ago I had the good fortune to see the Broadway hit "Hamilton" – a black and Hispanic hip-hop version and cast of the founding fathers of the nation and the extraordinary struggle they underwent with each other as much as England as they envisioned then articulated a new republic minus a monarch. They fought, debated, rallied, and dueled with each other.

Jon Stewart said the other day a huge 'bait and switch' has succeeded – the majority party has cynically said, "We are going to make sure government doesn't work then we are going to use its lack of working as evidence of its dysfunction. I guarantee you," Stewart said, "that the majority party is going to have a come to Jesus moment about the power of government and they will reap the benefit of Trump's victory."<sup>iv</sup>

Even if the use of that power and benefit means they will cynically favor corporate greed, the fossil fuel industry, the bizarre ideology of a few marginal racists and stroking the ego of a self-absorbed narcissist in chief.

If we understand cherished rights and freedoms are being sacrificed for the retaining and abuse political power then we must rise up.

Christ the King Sunday and today's text from Philippians is relevant to this discussion; the writer goes from depicting Jesus emptying and humbling himself to being exalted by God as the name above all names.

In his letter, the Apostle Paul reminds us that there is one Sovereign over all creation, one Lord of all. This allegiance to a power higher than any earthly power was the catalyst that awakened the moral vision and courage of Martin Luther, John Calvin and other Reformers when the hierarchy of the Roman Church claimed authority that violated biblical principles and the historic faith and practice of their own church.

Again, in the 1930s, in Germany, when Adolf Hitler was claiming authority over the Lutheran church which was the state church, a small band of clergy and religious leaders formed to say essentially what the Reformers said in the 1500s – that there is one God, one Sovereign, one Lord all. Most of those resisters were executed.

When leaders of the government or the church claim authority above all other authorities, above the Bill of Rights or the Constitution or the Bible, as this new administration appears to be contemplating, then the people cannot remain silent.

One person in this congregation who did not remain silent stopped by to hand deliver a letter and a check early last week. The letter said this: "Here is a check to augment my annual contribution. We may well find that institutions like Westminster are the last bulwark against another Kristallnacht. Although I recognize how important it is for churches to provide material assistance or intervene economically when other institutions default, I am convinced that worship and praise of God is, in a practical and realistic way, the only way, in the long run, that the world will be 'made over.' I hope that the enclosed check will be used accordingly."

It has only been ten days since the election; our vigilant watchfulness will alert us to the first and earliest attempts to govern in the style of a dictator to which we will respond by employing all of the rules and procedures available in a democracy. And, our efforts to get out of our self-selected opinion and interest groups will enable us to align with those who feel forgotten and lost in this economy. But it is the worship and praise of God, as our church member clearly affirms, in these challenging times, that will keep us focused and grounded as 'agents of reconciliation' who serve one Sovereign and Lord of life.

There are safety pins available in bowls at the meet and mingle table; take one, put it on; it signifies that you are a safe ally and will stand with anyone who is being harassed or taunted—of which there are many reports, nationally, since November 8<sup>th</sup>.

It may not seem like much. But it is a first step to channel your concern.

We need more people to actively channel their concern for healing, and for peace and justice in our nation. We need more safe citizens and safe communities where conversations like this can take place and where the true greatness of America – our pluralism and democracy – is honored and protected. Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> Interview of Jon Stewart by Charlie Rose, CBS “This Morning,” 11.18.16.

<sup>ii</sup> “Donald Trump’s Disturbing Picks,” *The New York Times* Editorial, A22, 11.19.16

<sup>iii</sup> Roger Cohen, “The Man Who Would Be King,” *The New York Times*, A22, 11.19.16.

<sup>iv</sup> Jon Stewart interview with Charlie Rose.