

## **Patriotism, Nationalism, and the Kingdom of God**

2019-08-11 - Year C - Proper 14 - The Rev. Christopher M. Klukas

Genesis 15:1-6; Psalm 33:10-21; Hebrews 11:1-16; Luke 12:32-40

- "...a gunman stormed into a Walmart and opened fire [last] Saturday, apparently targeting Mexicans and Mexican-Americans, having written a manifesto sounding his alarm over what he called an 'invasion of Hispanics,' the authorities said."<sup>1</sup> We now know that 22 people were killed.
- Patriotism vs nationalism
  - Patriotism - "the love and affection one feels for his country...based on the values a country espouses and the way it strives to improve."
  - Nationalism - "rooted in the belief that one's country is superior to all others, and carries the connotation of disapproval of other nations or a rivalry with other nations...builds up one's own country by tearing other countries down. Nationalism supports dominating other countries."<sup>2</sup>
- The danger of nationalism is that it makes an idol out of one's nation.
  - Globally, this can look like one nation refusing to cooperate with others and making decisions that are only good for them and often cause harm to others.
  - Within a nation, it can give rise to movements like white nationalism.
- Our Scripture passages today can help to point us in the right direction as we consider the nations of the world, and our attitude toward our own nation.

### **The Nation Whose God is the Lord**

- Psalm 33:10-11 - "The Lord brings the counsel of the nations to nothing...the counsel of the Lord stands forever."
  - John Goldingay - "When the Old Testament speaks of 'the nations,' it often refers to the imperial power of the day, the superpower—Assyria, Babylon, Persia, or Greece. It can seem that the superpower's policies are the decisive factor in the world, but the psalm knows that Yahweh's policy is actually the decisive factor."<sup>3</sup>
- Psalm 33:12a - "Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord..."
  - Some have misquoted this verse to apply it to our own nation. In other words, If America would just choose God, God would bless our nation again.
    - Certainly, I have no trouble with the idea of revival in America, that would be fantastic! But I don't think that is what this verse has in mind.
  - This is not talking about any nation that chooses God. In fact, it is not about the choices people make at all. It is talking about the particular nation that he has chosen for himself - Israel.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/06/us/mass-shootings.html>

<sup>2</sup> <https://grammarist.com/usage/patriotism-vs-nationalism/>

<sup>3</sup> John Goldingay, Psalms for Everyone, Part 1: Psalms 1–72 (Old Testament for Everyone; Louisville, KY; London: Westminster John Knox Press; Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2013), 105.

- 33:12b - “and blessed are the people he has chosen for himself to be his inheritance”
- In the Old Testament, the nation of Israel and the people of God were the same.
- In the New Testament, being a part of his people is no longer by birth but by faith.
- “The people he has chosen for himself” are now scattered throughout every nation of the world and come from every race. They are a part of God’s kingdom - already but not yet.
- We have to be careful not to confuse the nation we live in with the Kingdom of God. If we believe them to be one and the same, it can lead to nationalism.

### **Seeking a Homeland**

- Hebrews 11:14 - People who speak in this way are seeking a homeland.
  - The people of faith whom the writer of Hebrews mentions by name were all seeking something that was beyond themselves.
  - We seek the same thing. The world around us is not the way it is supposed to be, and it is not the way that it will be. We long for the day when everything will be set right. Romans 8:20-23 - “...the whole creation has been groaning...”
  - The values of the Kingdom will always be at odds with the values of the world. The values of this world come from the prince of this world, Satan. But Jesus is King and his Kingdom is overtaking the kingdom of the evil one bit by bit.
- John 17:14–19 - In the world but not of the world. “Keep them from the evil one.”

### **The Welfare of the City**

- How do we remain in the world and yet keep ourselves from becoming like it?
- Jeremiah’s instructions to the people of Israel in exile give us a good model to consider.
  - Jeremiah 29:4–7 - “Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you.”
  - The people of Israel would never have thought that the place they were living, Babylon, was the “nation whose God is the Lord”. And yet, Jeremiah tells them to seek the welfare of the city.
  - When we act as patriots, we are loving the place where God has planted us, and we seek its welfare, even as we continue to long for our true homeland.
    - Because one of the values of the Kingdom is loving our neighbor, we also seek the welfare of other people and nations.
- Fr. Rob Patterson, in a pastoral letter regarding the recent shootings. “As followers of Jesus, however, our hearts are not only moved to obey the goodwill of God, but we are also moved to participate in God’s renewing activity in the world. This means not only proclaiming the Good News of Jesus, but also decrying the evil in opposition to that Good News. To establish good involves disestablishing evil.”
- Every time we decry evil, or pray for an enemy, or create something beautiful we are bringing a little more of God’s Kingdom into the darkness of this world.
- It is easy to be disheartened and discouraged when faced with the evil of a mass shooting, or human trafficking, or racism. But don’t worry, the sky is not falling.
- John 16:33 - “But take heart; I have overcome the world.”