

Community Church of Issaquah

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Are We One Nation Under God?

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Each of us journeys out into the world often, going to the grocery store, visiting the senior center, going to a host of very different places. Have you ever looked around while you are there and taken notice of who is with you in that spot? Stand in the self-check line of a Fred Meyer Store or in a Costco Store and take note of who is with you. When I am desperate and force myself to go to the Costco near me for a few items, I am always overwhelmed at the diversity of the people around me. People of so many ethnicities, so many cultures, so many countries seem overwhelming. With that in mind, preparing for the Fourth of July always brings me to the Pledge of Allegiance when we say we are “One Nation Under God.” One nation? What does that mean? Does it mean there is just one country that is under the control of God? Or does it mean that all the people in this country form one national family under God’s control? Good questions.

If I had to choose one or the other of those options, I would definitely go with our country – one country – being a place of many, many different people. But does that mean that all the people in our country have to be under the same God? What about the Jews or Muslims or Hindus or all the other faith traditions? Since they don’t worship the God that you and I do, are they excluded from our nation? That is something for us to ponder for sure, but it also should

cause us to think clearly about those peoples who form our United States. When we turn our attention to those who are not like you and me, we should be brought back to a very underlying reality. All of those people are our neighbors and are people we are commanded to love. It's when we don't love them that causes our country to falter.

Today our news media is over-loaded with story after story about people who are being pushed out of our national family – immigrants, refugees, people of color, homeless, and so many more. If God is in control of our nation, then why is this exclusion and hate so rampant in our society today? That's easy to answer. Because too many people who believe in God and God's mandates have chosen NOT to love their neighbors or anyone who is not like them. Both the Old and New Testaments are full of instructions for us to care for, be kind to, and love those in our world. We should all be aware of the truth that this commandment was not then and is not now optional. And it is not about feelings but actively choosing to demonstrate that love through our actions.

I don't have to remind you of the story Jesus told about the Good Samaritan, do I? There in the 10th chapter of Luke is the story of a Jewish man on his way somewhere along a road that obviously was very dangerous. He was attacked by thieves who robbed him, beat him and left him there to die. Then two fellow Jews come along. One was a priest and the other a Levite. Both were likely shocked and frightened, but also probably sympathetic. But in fear that the robbers might still be near, they fled. And then comes along a Samaritan, an Arab. He was the one who cared for

the wounded man and paid for all the things the man needed.

After Jesus told the story, he had a message for his followers and for us. To love our neighbors, meaning anyone, including other races, other class, other religions – we are to love them all. There is a truth to this story that we sometimes don't weave into our own world. Loving our neighbors means not just saying we have warm feelings toward others, but it means doing something. We are in the middle of that today in our country. It's one thing for us to feel compassion and empathy for what is happening to so many others who call America home. It's entirely different to do something about it.

It was not a casual expression of care for those who lived in Tent City 4 when we as a church tried to offer assistance. When Jesus told us to feed the hungry, we took food to the 26 women and men living there. When Jesus said care for those who were thirsty, we took water to them. When they needed to be clothed, we took boxes of clothing. Had we simply heard stories about our neighbors in that Tent Camp and chosen to do nothing, we would have missed the meaning of "neighbor."

One of the things that many feel is the very core of helping others is to convert them to the way we believe. After all, isn't that what evangelizing is all about? If you want an answer to that question, look more closely at Jesus. Do you remember the story of him healing a man who was born blind? When he does the healing, he never tell the man who he is nor what his life is about. It isn't until later

when the man come back to Jesus that he learns who Jesus is and Jesus helps him come to a new faith. We don't always have to convert the sinner, but we should always be open to every opportunity to help. We must never reach out to help in order to be coercive or only give people material help on the condition that they hear the Gospel. That's not exactly what loving your neighbor is all about,

We should try to make sure people know that we are doing the deeds we do in the name of Christ. Give others the reason that you want to care for and love all people, your neighbors. Tell them about your commitment to Christ and the message he taught. But understand that there are many, many people who are your neighbors who are not Christian. Does that mean you are not obligated to offer any assistance to them? No. Your loving your neighbor and reaching out from that love cannot be restricted to only those who are like you. Base your love of your neighbors on the words from John 3:16, "For God so love the WORLD," and know that is all inclusive of everyone, not only a select few.

What can you and I do to make our nation a loving place under the watchful eyes of God? Here are some thoughts from my heart to yours:

- Show God's love so that it transforms you and overflows to others
- Show compassion more and more, even when it is not convenient

- Be patient and kind, not giving in to the unkind actions we see so often
- Look for the good in others because we all deserve the best
- Go the extra mile, doing more than is expected
- Listen more, taking time to hear what is happening in the lives of others
- Pray for them and for their well-being
- Be a peacemaker, remembering that Beatitude, “Blessed are the peacemakers.” Be one of those.

So why is all this important today? Christian Nationalists. White Supremacists, Antisemites, Anti-Muslims, Homophobes and so much more have flooded our country with hate. Ours is not now the one we knew when as kids we stood in school with our hand over our heart and repeated that Pledge of Allegiance and the words “One nation under God.” Ours is a divided nation with wounds that will take generations well beyond ours to resolve, if they are ever able to do so.

So, why is loving your neighbor so important? Let me share these thoughts:

- Loving your neighbor reveals God’s love for the world
- Loving your neighbor fulfills the law that Jesus gave us
- Loving your neighbor keeps us from being isolated in life
- Loving your neighbor brings so much satisfaction and joy

- Loving your neighbor is essential for our spiritual growth
- Loving your neighbors reflects the very nature of who God is

One final thought. When we choose to love our neighbor as ourselves, we recognize that we have value and worth, a gift we can extend those same values and worth to others. Are we one nation under God? I think you know the answer to that. We have our work cut out for ourselves. Let's move past the easy thing of loving each other and move deeper into loving the stranger, the immigrant, the homeless, the poor, and all the others who make up our country that we say we love and will strive to make a better place.