

“Toward A more perfect union: Election 2020” by Pastor Steve Sommerer
14th Sunday after Pentecost Sept. 6, 2020

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

The sermon text is from Romans 13:1-10 previously read.

As I do, many of you remember being taught in school about the blessings of being an American citizen. There was no derisive, hatred of self then over who was privileged, white or black, male or female. To be sure, we were subject to the same covetous thoughts and the petty desire to lift ourselves up by tearing others down, but nobody thought it was a good idea to work it into our school curriculum. In our Lutheran school, and, no doubt, most schools public or private, we were taught that we were all privileged beyond any people on earth, privileged because we lived in an imperfect place, for sure, but a place desired by every refugee in the world.

I can't speak to how American history is taught now. Galesburg Christian School certainly teaches our boys that the United States is blessed of God and was founded with the “tools” to allow her to correct course and grow from a less into a “more perfect union.” As we enter this sometimes riveting, often nauseating Fall election season, we examine our Epistle this morning to talk about what are your duties as citizens of the United States.

God has ordered the Fallen world in such a way that He rules over you through three different orders. The highest most important institution through which God rules His people is the Church, the Kingdom of Grace, where God rules by means of His Word only those who are saved through faith in Jesus. If you're part of that Kingdom of Grace through faith in Jesus, your “*citizenship is in heaven.*” If you're not reborn through Spirit-given faith, you are ruled by the devil and going to hell. There are no free agents.

In the Church, God rules by calling pastors to preach, distribute the Lord's Supper and baptize into Jesus; and, in the Church of Christ which Paul calls our mother, God the Father bears sons and daughters to faith as they are born again from the womb of the Church the Baptismal font by the water and the Holy Spirit.

God rules us in His Church for blessing and salvation. The Large Catechism says, “**God has appointed a community on earth, through which He speaks and does all His work... Outside this community [the Church] where there is no Gospel, there is also no forgiveness, no holiness [and no salvation].**” Luther didn't mean a building or denomination, but God gives His gifts in a community of faith, as He gathers His Church around the Gospel and Sacraments.

That stands as a good warning: if you think you can be a Lone Ranger Christian and cease being fed through the Word and Sacraments. Such a one is no child of God, but a despiser of Jesus' bloody agonies and death. To the one who treats the blood of Jesus as useless and unimportant, “*O wicked one, you shall surely die. Turn from your ways and live.*” In the spiritual realm, the Church is the most significant way God rules and blesses our lives. Fed and forgiven in God's Church we are taught to live in love as citizens and strengthened by the Spirit to put love into action.

In this world, God rules over you first through the family. It is the most significant way God blesses your **earthly** lives. He gives husbands to be the loving heads of their homes, willing to sacrifice as Jesus did, for the life of his bride and family. Wives are called to honor their husbands and be subject to them as partners in God's grace and out of reverence for Christ. Husbands and wives, God calls to be open to receiving the gift of children, if it be His will. *Be fruitful and multiply.* And within the order of the family, God provides daily bread, discipline, education and a work ethic. Is there any doubt the decay of our society mirrors the decay of the American home?

Jesus defined marriage this way, *"From the beginning God made them male and female... so a man will leave father and mother and be united to his wife."* If Jesus says, it's male and female, end of questions for me, because I know He knows what's best. But not just male and female until we get sick of each other. Jesus said, *"What God hath joined together, let no one tear asunder."*

Broken homes can lead to broken lives for the spouses who split and especially hurtful to their children. Children from broken homes are arrested and incarcerated more often, struggle with addiction or dependence or suicidal thoughts and struggle more often with their sexual identity and expressing it in healthy ways. Other lines of demonic attack against the family are the rejection of children. He attacks family peace and unity by teaching children they don't owe respect and honor to parents. He attacks family through the ever-present pornography that places a hideous image between husband and wife. God's pattern and way works better, and you're not a hater to get that.

I think our failures within our families are the most painful of all, but Christian families are places of grace and forgiveness, where Jesus gives Himself. You aren't a perfect mom or dad, but you have a perfect Father who will never leave you. You aren't a perfect husband or wife, but as members of God's Church you have a perfect Bridegroom Christ, who purchased you by His blood. You aren't a perfect son or daughter, but Jesus God's own Son was perfectly obedient to the Father for your sake.

The third order or institution through which God rules over us and provides for our blessing is earthly government. *"Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God and those that exist have been instituted by God."* The devil hates good government, because Satan wants murder and chaos and rioting and distrust and misery and hatred, so the church's work is hindered.

So, what would make St. Paul say, *"Let everyone be subject to the authorities"* when it was Emperor Nero's earthly government that beheaded Paul with an axe. Certainly, Paul understood that those in government could sin against their vocations, and act wrongly, just as parents and children and spouses can sin against theirs. Yet Paul commanded, *"I urge prayers for kings and all in authority that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way."* When we pray for presidents and governors and cops, we mean that prayer in every way, but there's a way it's selfish too. As Paul says, *"I urge prayers so that we may lead godly, dignified lives."*

This Christian duty as earthly citizens is for the good of all. 2 Chronicles 7 says, *"If My people who are called by My name humble themselves, and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land."* My people means you. Repent and pray and lift our land to God.

For us voting is a duty of love for our neighbor, as well as a privilege earned by patriot blood. Many of the issues that divide republican and democrat, are arguments

over the best way to accomplish the same end. We want all to be happy and healthy and secure. You and I may disagree whether raising taxes or lowering taxes is the way to accomplish that, and that's OK – except of course, if the sacrifices you are voting for are always someone else's sacrifices. That's just selfish and coveting and trying to use government to hurt others. We always have to be aware of sinful motivations. But that said, many issues can be viewed differently by different folks.

I would suggest two issues are indeed moral issues about which God has spoken: Marriage, Jesus said it's one man and one woman for life. End of story. The other is that life is God's gift from conception to natural death. You are not God. *"Thou shalt not kill."* Sadly, sometimes there may not be a pro-family, pro-life alternative that fits our faith. I'd just say: Your vote doesn't belong to a union boss or interest group. Don't support with your voice or your vote what God rejects, and don't reject what God supports. And where the lines are fuzzy, pray God raise up thoughtful leaders who love our land and can lead us forward.

Paul writes: *"The government is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for He does not bear the sword in vain."* Notice, God gives lawful government the power of the sword. So, don't break the Law. Our soldiers didn't confront Hitler with cupcakes, but weapons. Our police defend and protect with weapons we pray they will never have to use.

Because they represent God as His instituted authority, we pray God give our political leaders and military and law enforcement officers safety and good judgment. *"Rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad,"* our text says. But it's also true that just as spouses and parents and children can sin in and against their God-given responsibilities, so can cops or elected leaders. We trust by experience and observation that cops who behave badly are the exception. But because they also represent us, we join the many good, faithful law enforcement officers in demanding accountability. We can't ignore injustice, but we must work within the Law and not rush to judgment.

"Love does no wrong to a neighbor." And so good citizens join our voices in demanding a color-blind application of the Law. God loves all, and so should we. It's our duty to God and the neighbor. Satan wins in a race war when white and black are pitted against each other. Every life is precious. Every life matters. *"Red and yellow, black and white, all are precious in His sight."* God wants all to be saved in Jesus.

Where we see injustice, we speak for what's right. We vote for what's right and good. We pray that God's good prescriptions for the best shape of human life be realized in our families and nation, and that God would put down every effort of Satan to divide us and sow the seeds of strife. We can't ally ourselves with organizations whose stated purpose is to destroy the nuclear family. That creates a worse problem than it solves. Nor can we fail to stand and speak for those who desire a healing of our nation's wounds and work for the goal equal justice and a more perfect union.

We all know how hard it is, so we pray God's will be done. The Psalmist wrote, *"Do not put your trust in princes or mortal men who cannot save."* This is our nation, and God calls us to work for her good. But this is God's world and no president or judge controls the future. Pray, if you love your nation and your neighbor and you know God promises to hear and help. Forces hostile to our Constitution would happily cancel the voice of God's people. This is no time for laziness, or cowardice or blissful ignorance.

Cancel culture isn't new. The Apostles were forbidden to speak in the name of Jesus Christ – the “*only name*”, *Peter said, “given among men by which we must be saved.”* His answer must be ours as we speak for Christ, vote our faith and live our faith. Until Christ comes again, we will be subject to all rightful authority where we are able, and when we can't, “*We must obey God rather than men.*” May God grant us the wisdom always to see what is right and the courage to do it. God bless our native land, firm may she ever stand; until the day He calls us home. Amen.

And now may the peace of God which surpasses human understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.