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St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749
Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
July 3, 2016
7th Sunday after Pentecost

Scripture Lessons: 1 Peter 2:11-17, Matthew 7:24-29

Hymns: 575, 579; 581, 577 (242:1-3)

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

Sermon Text: Psalm 33:8-12

Let all the earth fear the LORD;

Let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him.

9 For He spoke, and it was done;

He commanded, and it stood fast.

10 The LORD brings the counsel of the nations to nothing;

He makes the plans of the peoples of no effect.

11 The counsel of the LORD stands forever,

The plans of His heart to all generations.

12 Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD,

The people He has chosen as His own inheritance. (NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth.
Amen.

In Christ Jesus, God my Savior, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: Are you "Proud to be an American?"

In a poll leading up to this 4th of July week-end it was discovered that the people that answered that question in the affirmative was the lowest it has ever been, just barely over 50%. The newscasters that were reporting this expressed surprise. I was surprised right along with them. Then they started to speculate why this might be.

The two areas they brought up were the messy political scene we are experiencing, and the poor economy that has left so many millions of Americans struggling financially.

It started me thinking, and I was a bit surprised by my own thoughts. You see one of my favorite patriotic songs for many years now is Lee Greenwoods: "*God Bless the USA.*" I liked singing along "I'm proud to be an American where at least I know I'm free!" and "I'll stand up next to you and defend her yet today." But then, as I was pondering this on why Americans wouldn't be proud to be Americans even though this is the best place to live in all the world, I started to think about what's been in the news in the last week or so. As a child of God I realized that these were the things that made me less proud to be an American.

In a number of American cities there were great celebrations of sin with parades led by prominent political figures encouraging sinners to be proud of their sinful lifestyles. The Supreme Court struck down a law protecting women's health, saying the states concern that only qualified doctors perform surgical procedures was trumped by a woman's right to kill the baby growing within her womb. And so the slaughter of innocents goes on in America. At the same time a Lutheran High School in Wisconsin is being sued by the group Freedom from Religion because they don't hire gay staff or enroll openly gay students, and this private Lutheran High School doesn't have transgender bathrooms. In an Eau Claire public high school Christian students have been openly harassed by teachers first and then also by many students, because they believe that marriage is to be between one man and one woman, and that for sexual conduct to be God pleasing it should be restricted to that context.

Now, if I sing "I'd stand up next to you and defend her yet today," I could mean that regarding defending our country against foreign invaders and tyranny, but I would be hard pressed to defend America before the Lord. But where am I going with this? On this Fourth of July weekend it is more important than ever that the words on our lips, the prayer in our hearts be --

THEME: God Bless the USA.

We should pray: --

I. May America Acknowledge Almighty God.

In our text this was the psalmist's prayer and contention:

Psalm 33:8-9 Let all the earth fear the LORD;

Let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him.

9 For He spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast.

The world, and this includes America, doesn't fear the Lord. The world no longer believes that God is almighty. The world no longer believes that God is the Creator of heaven and earth. The world no longer believes that God made man in His image. They choose to believe that man, by the force of nature, by the force of his own will, rose up from the lower apes, even from the slime of swamps and bogs, and so we became as gods, knowing that we are all-powerful, and knowing both good and evil. In our American society evolution is accepted as wisdom and truth, and believing otherwise is evidence of ignorance. While **we** commend those who testify to the greatness of God in His creation or the truth of the account of the great flood with a replica of Noah's ark, **the world** scoffs.

The psalmist in the verses immediately before our text comments on how the Lord called the universe with all its starry host into being by the power of His word. And so it is also with us. We confess the words of another psalm: **"Know that the Lord, He is God; It is He who has made us, and not we ourselves"** (Psalm 100:3)!

We should stand in awe of God, for He spoke, He simply spoke, and it was done, and it was all done in perfection, a perfection that we cannot appreciate now because of the corrupting power of sin. Even so, in spite of sin's corrupting presence, as we see the splendor of America, with its purple mountains majesty and its fields of grain that feed so many millions every day, we stand in awe of the Lord and the greatness of His power, and His goodness and mercy, **"He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust"** (Matthew 5:45).

May God bless America with the wisdom to know that the Lord, He is God that we as a nation might revere Almighty God and hold Him in fear and awe once more.

II. May America Know the Holy Will of God.

It's not only in America, but it is common throughout the world that man presumes that his own will is absolute. Man is determined to plot his own course for the world, and for all the people in it. We see tyranny raise its ugly head. We do see people suffer, and we see the evidence of persecution against those who would follow the Word and will of God.

In our weakness we are often fearful of what will become of the world, and the Lord's kingdom in this world. Our concern is especially focused on our own nation, the America we so dearly love. What will become of America as we see court decisions that protect and even promote sin and unrighteousness, as we see hatred cultivated, and class envy prosper? We might find ourselves wringing our hands as we wonder: "What shall we do? What shall we do?"

We know the will of God is done on earth even as it is done in heaven. We pray that with both confidence and understanding every time we pray the Lord's Prayer. The words of our text build our confidence within us.

Psalm 33:10 "The LORD brings the counsel of the nations to nothing; He makes the plans of the peoples of no effect.

We know that the Lord, He is God! He still is God, and His will is done. The counsel of the Lord mentioned in our text is not some fickle determination concerning the fate of mankind as if He were playing a giant version of the board game Risk. It is the gracious good will of God for the advancement of His kingdom, for the salvation of souls.

To that end He received Jesus, our Savior into heaven and sat Him down at His right hand, and gave all authority to Jesus in heaven and on earth. Jesus rules today and forevermore. Jesus directs the affairs of this world for the advancement of the gospel, for the

salvation of souls. He allows the evil of men to continue only in grace as He is patient, desiring all men to be saved. So we see that mankind is thoroughly evil as the perpetuation of man's inhumanity to man overwhelms the attempts at good that man might do. We see people mad with false religions kill and slaughter other people in airports and night clubs and we wonder, "Is God in control?" The answer is "yes!" and it is with purpose. The counsel of nations are nothing before the Lord. It doesn't matter to God what the Supreme Court decides, or what the United Nations determines, or what the president of this or that country declares. The Lord is not subject to their authority. The counsel of the nations are brought to nothing before Him. He has proven this time and again in history, and it remains true yet today.

People's plans and even their evil conspiracies, are brought to no effect. The Lord reigns! And so we pray:

III. May America Be Blessed by God's Grace.

Psalm 33:11-12 The counsel of the LORD stands forever,
The plans of His heart to all generations.
12 Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD,
The people He has chosen as His own inheritance.

The counsel of the Lord is what rules the day, and plans of His heart stands forevermore. God is determined to bring salvation to the darkest recess of this world, to the darkest recesses of human hearts. God is determined to bring life to dead souls. He is determined to protect His Church.

By God's grace during the early 19th century orthodox Lutheranism was brought to the United States, and the gospel flourished in our land. The Word of the Lord grew; His kingdom grew. God has fulfilled His gracious good will among us. I think what we fear is that this time of grace for America is drawing to a close, for that also is a lesson of history. When nations turn their backs on the Word, then the Lord moves the Word to the lands who still hunger and thirst for righteousness. If this is the concern of our hearts then we need to bring that forth more ardently than ever in prayer before the Lord.

We love our country, our homeland. We love our fellow citizens, even as the Apostle Paul possessed in his heart a special love for his fellow Jews. In his epistles Paul repeatedly wrote of his desire for their salvation and how they occupied so much of his prayers. So it is fitting and right for us to pray, not just think about praying for America, or saying a few words in passing, but to seriously pray for our country that God might continue to bless us with His grace. We need to pray in this election year that He would continue to direct the course of our nation and of our elections that America might be blessed. We need to pray that the Lord would grant wisdom and godly counsel to our leaders, to our judges and justices, to our legislators, and governors and president, so that we might continue to worship the Lord in peace, and to testify to the glory of His name.

We know God's desire that sinners repent, that the people of the nations acknowledge Him, and worship Him. We know that the Lord desires the salvation of all people. So this is true among us in America also. The Lord is no respecter of borders. His people, His "nation" or kingdom is made up of all who believe, no matter what the color of their skin or what language they speak. It is our prayer for **America** that more and more of our fellow Americans will also be citizens of this kingdom, that our nation may continue to be blessed not only with bounty of things material and so with wealth and prosperity, but more importantly with things spiritual. We pray that we might know the Lord and how He has chosen us who believe to be His own holy nation, His inheritance, (what an amazing thought that we are His inheritance, what He desires to gain from the death of His Son.) all that to this end and goal, that we possess the inheritance of everlasting life.

So then, as we gather for our Independence Day celebrations with neighbors and friends, may our prayer continue to be a prayer uttered sincerely and with understanding of all that is true and at stake for our country, **"May God Bless the USA!"**

AMEN.

"Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." Amen. (Romans15:13)