

The Rev. Joel Petruschke
Our Saviour Lutheran Church
November 14, 2021
Pentecost 25—Veteran's Day Recognition

Let us pray...May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, for you are our strength and you are most certainly our redeemer. Amen.

Sisters and Brothers, over the years it has been our tradition here at Our Saviour to hold Veteran's Day Recognition service on the second Sunday in November.

As we know, Veteran's Day appears on the secular calendar on November 11th.

And it is right that we honor our men and women in the military.

It is right that we remember even in church those who have served and are currently serving our nation.

It is right that we acknowledge those who devote themselves to maintaining the freedom of our country.

And so, we have listed today in our bulletin the many names of those who are family and friends who have served.

And each week we have prayed for our military personnel currently serving.

It is right and most appropriate that we should regularly think of these persons, and that we should pray for their well-being.

PAUSE

Now, perhaps we think it strange that we pray for our military.

Perhaps we think it peculiar that we lift up to God those persons trained to defend our country.

After all, armed conflict would seem to smack in the face of God's vision of peace and good will for all people.

Right?

So, it seems perhaps counterintuitive that we pray for our military.

PAUSE

So today, I want to remind us of a powerful teaching from Martin Luther.

Today, I thought it would be helpful to recall to our minds a teaching from Luther called "The Two Kingdom Theory."

The Two Kingdom Theory.

Now, The Two Kingdom Theory describes the two ways in which God works in the world for the good of people and society as a whole.

Now, in the one kingdom, the kingdom on the "right," as it is sometimes called, or what is also sometimes called the "heavenly kingdom"...

In the one kingdom, God's power is demonstrated through the church.

Through the church, the gospel of Jesus Christ is proclaimed.

Through the church, the power of God's mercy, forgiveness, and love is revealed in Jesus Christ.

Through the church, we hear about mercy, forgiveness, and love.

And, the church is charged with embodying mercy, forgiveness, and love.

You and I are supposed to be merciful, forgiving, and loving.

The church, then, is one way God works in the world for the good of people and society as a whole.

God works in the world through the proclamation of the gospel.

And, if all humanity truly embodied the gospel...

If all humanity truly embodied God's mercy, forgiveness, and love for one another...

If we were to all seek out what is best for one another, well then the world would be a very good place indeed.

PAUSE

If all human beings truly abided by God's will as revealed in the gospel...

If all human beings were truly altruistic, well then God's vision for us come would in fact be revealed in all its fullness.

If only all people truly embodied the gospel.

But, as we know, that is not case in our world.

As we know, people are not perfect.

As we know, sin rears its ugly head, and the world can be a pretty ugly place.

In no way, do all people, at all times, abide by God's will.

In no way, do all people, all the times, embody the gospel of mercy, forgiveness, and love.

In no way, do all people, all the times, proclaim Christ through their very lives.

No, instead we as people are greedy, we are selfish, we are hurtful.

No, instead, we as people are cruel, indifferent, and unloving.

In short, we as people are sinful.

And it is this human sin, when extended beyond mere individuals...

When human sin is prevalent in entire populations, and less face it, sin always is pervasive in populations...

When human sin extends into society at large, well then the outcome includes things like famines, wars, and rumors of wars.

When human sin extends into society at large, the outcome includes things like natural disasters, the direct result of our abuse of the planet.

Yes, sin is the great undoing of human society.

No, we are not as one global human family bent on being altruistic.

No, we do not as one global human family express compassion to each other, nor mercy to each other, nor love toward each other.

At least not all of us, all the time.

And so, as a result, it is necessary for God to work in the world in another way, besides the church.

There is the kingdom on the right, the heavenly kingdom...

There is this kingdom, the way God works in the world called the church, by which the proclamation of the gospel happens.

There is the church by which the Spirit of God seeks to empower the people of God to be merciful, forgiving, and loving...

But, when that fails to produce the idyllic community, or beloved community, that is a selfless and loving people...

When God's work through the church fails to produce kingdom come here on earth...

Well, then God works through the kingdom on the left, or what is called the earthly kingdom.

And the earthly kingdom is the power of God seen in the institution of government.

Since human beings fail to heed the gospel, and fail then to embody God's love and mercy for one another, God needs to provide another means for good order and for the care of society.

And so, God, we can say, inspired in civilization the need for laws, government, and those powers that uphold them.

And just as the church is God's gift to God's people for the well-being of people.

So, too, is the institution of government God's gift for God's people.

And it is within this kingdom on the left, the earthly kingdom...

It is within this kingdom on the left where we find the military, which is raised up and called to protect our nation from those who would want to harm us and destroy our way of life.

But make no mistake about, armed conflict and war are not what God desires.

Armed conflict and war bring death and destruction.

Armed conflict and war displace people, upend families and communities.

These things are not good, but sometimes armed conflict and war are necessary and even just.

They are necessary and just because in the long run they seek to reestablish the well-being of community and order in society.

PAUSE

Yes, sometimes war and armed conflict are necessary and just.

Several years back, Ken Burns produced a seven-part television series for PBS called, "The War."

You may have seen it. Every once in a while it is still broadcasted.

It was a documentary about World War II.

Now World War II was a horrific war.

It was a war that threw Europe and the Pacific Islands into turmoil.

It was a war that introduced the world to the atomic bomb.

It was a war that resulted somewhere between 50 to 80 million deaths, the overwhelming majority of those were civilian deaths.

World War II was a horrific war.

But as one serviceman by the name of Sam Hynes who was interviewed for the Ken Burns documentary said, "I don't think there is such a thing as a good war. There are sometimes necessary wars. And I think one might say 'just' wars. I never questioned the necessity of that World War II. And I still don't question it. It was something that had to be done."

The words of Sam Hynes are spot on, when we think about what might have been if the Allied powers had NOT responded to the evil aggression perpetrated by Hitler, Mussolini, and Hirohito.

We hate to think what might have been if the allied powers had NOT won the war.

PAUSE

Yes, the kingdom on the left, the earthly kingdom, the kingdom in which God calls forth government and the powers of government for the order and well-being of society is of significant importance.

And there you have it, the Two Kingdom Theory, outlined by Martin Luther, expresses the two ways God provides for the human family.

There is the church, in which the gospel teaches God's people to be merciful, forgiving, and loving.

And then there is the institution of government, in which God uses law and order, backed by the powers of law enforcement and even the military.

Both kingdoms serve a similar purpose, to provide for the well-being of all people, but each kingdom accomplishes the task differently.

PAUSE

And so, this is why it is most appropriate for the Church to recognize our military personnel.

It is not that the Church is somehow glorifying war and armed conflict.

Some people might say there is no place for the American Flag in the sanctuary, or in the case today for all the flags of the military branches.

Some people might say there is no place for such emblems since these flags suggest that God favors our nation to the exclusion of others.

Some people might say that to utter the words, "God bless America" is wrong since it suggests that God doesn't bless all nations and peoples.

Yes, some people might say that a military recognition like this doesn't belong in church.

I would beg to differ.

No, what we do today, Friends, in our worship service...

What we are doing today is recognizing the call of all those faithful individuals who have served in the work of God's left-hand kingdom.

Our military personnel, our servicemen and women, they serve such an important role in the vision of God's plan for humanity.

For until that day comes, when all people embrace the gospel...

Until that day comes when all people are merciful, and forgiving, and loving to one another...

Until that day comes when the new creation is ushered in with the coming of Christ himself...

Until that day, when the right hand kingdom comes to full fruition, we need the left-hand kingdom.

We need those who serve in government. We need our law enforcement officers. And we need our military.

Without these, without the faithful persons who serve...we would be a people most to be pitied.

For from where would order in society come?

From where would the stability of communities come?

From where would our protection in the face of the enemy come?

God has provided these things.

God had placed in the minds of our forebears this notion of civilization, and the means to provide for and the means to maintain civilization.

God has done that, so says Martin Luther.

And it is called the left-hand kingdom, the earthly kingdom.

And today, on this Veterans' Day Recognition service, this is what we celebrate. Thanks be to God. Amen.