

Let us pray. May the words of my mouth and the meditations in our hearts be acceptable in your sight O Lord our Rock and our Redeemer; Amen.

Maybe you've heard or maybe you haven't. Maybe you're like me and refuse to turn the news on your television set for fear of what you might hear. It sure seems to be filled with a lot of drama lately! And the biggest news of the last couple weeks seems to be just that; drama. Right now in the NFL there is a big controversy going on surrounding the flag; should you stand, sit or kneel during the national anthem and the presentation of the flag, our flag, the American flag? There have been entire teams and their owners that have kneeled, as you may have seen on Monday night during prime time football with the Dallas Cowboys, prior to the beginning of the national anthem. There are certain players that have kneeled. There are certain players who have made fists. There are players who sat on the bench. Some suggested their teams stay in the locker rooms until the anthem is over. And there are also certain players who stand and have spoken out about those who kneel. What is this all about?

Many months ago Colin Kaepernick, then a signed player for the 49ers, took a knee during the national anthem. When he was asked why he refused to stand he replied, "I am not going to stand up to show pride in a flag for a country that oppresses black people and people of color." Since his initial stand, or kneeling, there have many NFL players who have spoken out against police brutality with people of color. And there have been many people on the other side of the fence, such as our president, who says their protests are ridiculous, that every American should stand and salute the flag, and those who don't are considered un-American and should even be fired from their jobs, particularly if they are a NFL player.

No matter which side of the aisle you are on regarding this issue, whether you think there should be rules put in place to force people to stand for the presentation of the flag and the

national anthem, or whether you are in support of protest of police brutality and the oppression of black people; this morning I would like you to consider what our Christian witness will be in the midst of the chaos happening in our world. How are we called to be Christ-like in the midst of the ridiculous controversies that surround us?

Years ago, the worship team in Chicago, Illinois at ELCA headquarters presented the Scripture rotation, also known as the revised common lectionary, to a team who approved the lessons for all ELCA congregations that exist on a three-year rotation. We are currently rotating in year A, which focuses its time in the book of Matthew. I can't help but notice, even though many times I get very frustrated with the lectionary because we seem to get the same stories over and over again, that our Epistle lesson fits in quite nicely with the world's current events. It always amazes me when it happens, but it does. God continues to speak through the prophets and apostles, and makes Scripture relevant, all these thousands of years later.

Hear Paul's words to us today, "Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross. Therefore, God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

After hearing how we are being guided by Scripture this morning, I can't help but wonder what my role, what our role is when confronted with these worldly issues, issues that seemingly don't matter in the grand scale of life. I know that I live in America. I know that I am American.

I know that countless people have died for me to have certain freedoms and rights, and one of those rights is to worship God. And I'm grateful. But for me, it seems that Scripture is clear, there is only one person worthy of my kneeling on behalf of, and that person is Jesus. In fact that's the point of the posture of kneeling, to point to someone greater than yourself. It's a position of humility. Jesus is the one who deserves my honor, my dedication, and my glory. He's the one who demands my obedience to his will, he's the one who I want to model my life after. He's the only one I should be submissive to, no matter what it is the world tells me.

It seems to me that the world lately has been taking its eyes off the prize so to speak, and that prize is Jesus Christ. It seems that we are getting caught up in silly things that have no long term relevance when it comes to our futures; to our faith life. And these controversies, or "big issues" that the mainstream media seems to be focused on are actually distracting us from doing what it is that we are called to do. You see I am a proud American. I am the daughter of a veteran who served in combat. I'm so grateful to live in a country where I have freedom of speech and freedom to serve my God. But even more than an American I'm a Christian.

In the waters of baptism God staked his claim over my life. And on that day, December 26, 1982 he looked at me and he said your first identity is as a child of God; not daughter, not sister, not wife or mother, not pastor, not American, your identity rests in me. Claim me, too. Submit to me. Humble yourself to serve me. Kneel for me alone, for I am the Lord your God and I'm a jealous God. Here's my son Jesus. He's your example, and he was obedient to me even unto death on the cross. And each day, I strive to do just what our Philippians passage asks of me. Some days I fail and some days I do pretty well, but at the end of the day, I try to remember my first and most important identity rests in Christ.

The world can be a distraction. If we are arguing over kneeling in a multi-million dollar football field, what are we missing? How many of our neighbors right here in our community will go to bed hungry tonight? How many of our brothers and sisters right here in Lititz are dying all alone because people are too busy to sit with them? How many of our brothers and sisters don't have enough money to pay to go to the doctors or to pay their rent? The world distracts us from who we are called to be, from Jesus' claim over our lives.

So I ask you brothers and sisters, what will our witness in the midst of the chaos be? Will we get caught up in controversies that have nothing to do with Jesus? Will we be distracted from the obedience that God calls us to by current events? Or will we be the voice of love and service? I pray that we will choose Jesus because Jesus has already chosen us, and claimed us and marked us forever. I pray that we will keep our eyes on the cross and spend our days in humble service to the one who loved us enough to send his only son in the world for our sakes. And I pray that we will be a voice of love and a voice of light in the midst of descent; that when people look at us they will have no doubt who we kneel for, God alone. Amen.