

Sermon for Sunday, November 1, 1970 by Andrew A. Jumper, Pastor
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"HERE WE STAND"
Ephesians 6:10-20

Text: "Therefore take the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand." Ephesians 6:13

It was the year 1517 and it was on the Eve of All Saints' Day. The place was a town in Germany named Wittenberg. A young Roman Catholic priest made his way to the Castle Church. Its door was the public notice board for all community announcements. On the door of the church the young priest tacked up a paper. It began, "Out of love and zeal for the elucidation of truth the following theses will be debated..." Had anyone seen the young monk posting his paper they would little have dreamed that they were witnessing one of the most significant events in human history. Those 95 theses he posted that day were not only tacked to the Castle Church door, they were indeed nailed to the heart and conscience of Christendom. Not only was Martin Luther kindling the fires of a religious revolution that was to sweep the world and leave its impact on religious history, he was doing at least two other things. First, what he did that day was to affect him personally. He was creating a personal position on which he would have to take a stand and in a real sense lay his very life on the line. Second, what he did that day was to affect you and me. Why us? Because much of what he stood for and taught has fathered many of the cherished ideas about freedom that are the foundation of our nation. And like Luther in the 16th century, we in the 20th century live in a time in which our stance demands of us that we take a stand--a stand that requires that many lay their individual lives on the line and that all of us collectively as a nation lay our lives on the line.

What is the particular and peculiar ideal that springs from the Reformation and on which our constitution and our nation rests? What is this strange and unique concept that is to us so basic, so fundamental, that we are willing to spend the lives and blood of our young men, the resources and wealth of our land, the energies and brainpower of our people? The first point I want to make this morning is that out of the Reformation came a new concept of man. What is that concept? It is the concept of the dignity, the worth, and the freedom of the individual. It is true that the Reformers, Luther and Calvin, did not invent this concept of the individual. We can see faint shadows of it in ancient Greece and Rome and its roots are embedded in the New Testament and in the early Church Fathers like Augustine. But with the coming of the Reformation a new emphasis, a new understanding, of individual freedom, individual worth, individual dignity came into being. Through Luther's doctrine of the priesthood of all believers and Calvin's doctrine of vocation, something precious in the life and teaching of Jesus Christ which for centuries had lain latent and dormant suddenly came sharply and clearly into focus.

As one writer has put it, "In the light of the concept of man as made in God's image and of his destiny as being to glorify God, no human organization can claim title to the whole man." It was this ideal which was to be the foundation on which a

nation would be built, a nation which would honor the surpassing worth of the individual. Yes, "No human organization can claim title to the whole man." If a nation believed that, then it was inevitable that it would stand unalterably opposed to any form of totalitarianism that claimed the whole man whether it be socialism, communism, fascism, or whatever.

450 years ago Luther proclaimed that man made in God's image was to glorify God and therefore must be free to exercise religious liberty. That proclamation drove a wedge into human history which was the fore runner of individual human rights that were to follow, resulting eventually in what was to be known as the Bill of Rights. So, first of all out of the Reformation came a new concept of man. Second, it was on this concept of man that a new nation was to be built. In the years that followed, when men who understood themselves in terms of this ideal were oppressed and persecuted, they came to a new land to build a new nation. And there on those shores so distant from home, they dared to come and suffer, to endure, and to carve from a hard and cruel wilderness a new home. They dared to come because they had an ideal in their hearts--an ideal that had come into focus in the Reformation but which had its taproots in the New Testament and in the life and message of a man named Jesus. In that new land they planted a staff from which fluttered that banner, that ideal.

So, first out of the Reformation came a new concept of man, and second a new nation was built that had that concept of man as its foundation stone. Third, though often more or less obscured from time to time, that ideal has been definitive in the development of our nation. In the years that followed that banner was often soiled and dirtied and tattered because the ideal often got out of focus. Consequently we were often guilty of such things as religious intolerance, of the institution of slavery, of racial discrimination, of economic repression, of social injustice. But always the staff stayed planted and the banner though dirty and stained, still fluttered in the breeze of history. And the ideal would come back into focus even if but momentarily. Separation of Church and State, the freedom of religion, the abolishment of slavery even though a family war had to be fought, the growth of unions, a whole system of jurisprudence seeking to assure justice and equality before the law, the desegregation of the races, the equal opportunity laws, all came about because that ideal still floated banner-like over the land and over the hearts and minds of its people. Even today, because the banner still floats, we are wrestling with what this ideal means in terms of poverty, of ghettos, of education, and the whole spectrum of civil rights. Yes, we have bungled the job often, wasted money, made mistakes, but we are the only nation in the world who today is seriously and earnestly trying to do something about poverty, ghettos, and human need.

So first out of the Reformation came a new concept of man, and second, it was the basis of a new nation, and third, though often obscured, that ideal has been definitive in the development of our nation. Fourth, because we believe in that ideal, we have developed an almost messianic mission about the freedom of the individual. We were not content for that banner to fly only over our own soil, for we were convinced that all men had the right to stand under that ideal. One of our

presidents had said that the world must be made free for democracy. So we crossed an ocean to spill our blood and spend our resources in World War I. Again, in World War II, we went back to do the job all over again because we believed in that ideal. And because we did believe, we picked up our enemies when the battle was over. We wiped the blood from his face, we bound his wounds, we rebuilt his cities, his factories, his commerce and we called it the Marshall Plan. Never before in history had any nation done what we did. To protect friends and allies from another loss of their freedom our nation gave of her resources, we placed our armed young men around the world at great expense--and all because we had an ideal about every man--an ideal for which we were willing to give of our resources and our blood. When friends used that freedom bought for them at such great price to reject us and abuse us, we accepted their venom because part of the freedom we fought to give them was the freedom to reject the giver.

Yes, our nation developed a sense of messianic mission about its ideal. One day, because it was founded on and believed in the dignity and worth, the freedom of the individual who was made in God's image and who therefore must not be made subject to any totalitarianism--yes, because we believed that, our nation went one day to a strange and distant place called Vietnam. There we planted our staff with its soiled and stained and tattered banner and said to those totalitarian forces who would claim the whole man. "Thus far and no farther."

Today critics come to spit on that banner, to curse it, to revile it, to throw refuse from the latrine of hatred upon it. They say, "You false Messiah, take your banner and go home." They say, "Your bombs kill innocent women and children. Your napalm is cruel and inhumane, your overwhelming firepower is like a bully picking on a little kid." And a nation which could, if it chose, wipe out its enemy in one day, wipes the spittle and corruption off its face and says, "Yes, but look at our banner. What is your alternative?" Yes, what are the alternatives to human dignity and individual freedom? This nation knows its banner is not pure, that it is soiled and patched and tattered. But somehow there is something basic and fundamental, something precious and a little saintly about that banner; and though tarnished there is a certain grandeur about it. And because our nation, down deep, has always believed in that banner and what it stands for, the graves of its young men are planted all over the world as a testimony of our deep conviction.

Will this nation and its life be but a brief episode in the long line of history? Will men look back a thousand years from now and wonder about that peculiar nation, those strange people, that existed for a few hundred years and then perished because it spent its life, its blood, its resources for a dream about man that could never come true, that was impossible from the beginning?

It is said that this nation is really selfish, its motives unpure or it is really concerned ultimately for its own self-interest. There is surely some justice in this charge, but it is not the whole truth. We are also fighting for a dream, an ideal, a belief about man. We covet no nation's land or its people or its resources. And even in a strange place like Vietnam, to whom our ideas of man and freedom are strange, who are often idolent, lazy, and undeserving, we

Yes, 450 years ago a young monk took his stand. He could not see all of the mistakes, the ills, the errors, the imperfections in his faith--he was not to be all right. Yet, he saw enough truth that he dared to plant a flag and to take his stand because he could not accept the alternatives. That day a concept of man--a belief about his dignity, worth, and freedom as one made in God's image--was born. On that concept a nation was built and on that concept a nation has stood. That nation has made mistakes, it has had its ills, its errors and its imperfections for we have never been all right. Yet, surely we see enough truth to know that we can accept no alternative. Luther was to say, "Here I stand. I can do no other. God help me." May God help us, too.

only desire for him what we demand for ourselves. And we are there not because he deserves to be helped, but simply because he is a human being who we believe has the same rights that we have. Foolish? Perhaps--but time and history will have to make that judgment. We have planted our banner, and because we believe in all it stands for, we will stand there.

Finally, I would like to suggest that all is not well with this nation of ours. Perhaps we cannot call ourselves a Christian nation, but we are indeed a nation that is founded on Christian principles. Today these principles are being ridiculed and rejected. A UPI reporter, Merriman Smith, writing of a march on Washington during the waning days of the Johnson Administration said he came away with dismay at the peace demonstrators apparent disregard for fact. He wrote "a bare-chested man, leader of one of several delegations from New York's hippie community, used a portable public address system to extol marijuana, Che Guevara, heap incredible obscenities on Johnson and his family--and urge all within his voice to join his group that night for mass fornication." He concluded, "I came away from the weekend feeling depressed by so many attractive young people being caught up in virulent, frequently irrational hatred in the name of love and peace." We live in a time when it is square to be patriotic, when it is corny to wave the flag, when it is old-fashioned to be committed to any moral standards, when it is stupid to believe in God, and when honesty, integrity, and hard work are debased.

Who must bear the blame for this weakening of our national foundations? You and I! We have let the Reformation flames burn low. We who are not committed to the faith, we who are neglecting our religious life, our church, we who do not steep our children in our Christian heritage, we who do not support the faith on which our nation is founded, we who neglect our own character development and who put other things ahead of God--we are the guilty ones. If this nation must ultimately fall, let it fall standing for what it was built on, but never let it fall from internal dry-rot and the decay of moral principle. As 450 years ago Martin Luther took his stand on principle and laid his life on the line for what he believed, let us call ourselves back to commitment to God, to Christ, and to his Church; let us commit ourselves again to basic principles and teach our children to fear God and to love our nation and to stand on those principles which made it great. Let us in our day fan to burning flame the smoldering Reformation insight about the liberty and freedom of the individual. Let us continue to hold high that banner, that though tattered and tarnished and stained, it might continue to flutter in the breeze of human history.

Whether we are right or whether we are wrong, whether we are still here or whether we have vanished from the scene, a thousand years from now let history say that this nation gave immeasurably of its resources, its blood, its life to defend a peculiarly Christian idea of the freedom and dignity of man, believing it to be the ideal. Let history say that this nation took a moral posture that made it assume under God a responsibility for universal freedom. Let history say that we attached more than patriotism to our flag for we alone of all nations endued it with a truly religious significance.