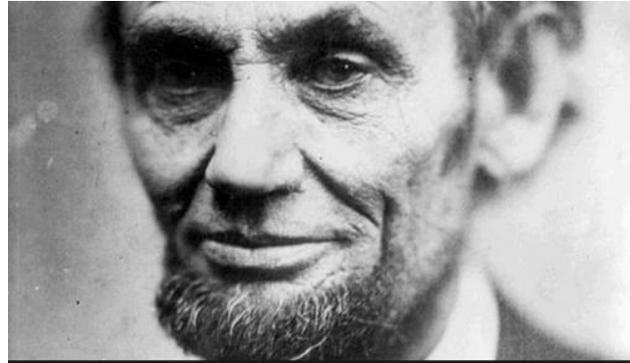


30 July 2021

Whose Side Are You On?

*Out of my distress I called on the Lord;
the Lord answered me and set me in a
broad place. With the Lord on my side
I do not fear. What can mortals do to
me? — Psalm 118:5-6*

*He has told you, O mortal, what is
good; and what does the Lord require
of you but to do justice, and to love
kindness, and to walk humbly with
your God? — Micah 6.8*



*“Sir, my concern is not whether
God is on my side;
my greatest concern is to be
on God’s side,
for God is always right.”
-Abraham Lincoln*

“Do not judge, so that you may not be judged. For with the judgment you make you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get. Why do you see the speck in your neighbor’s eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye? Or how can you say to your neighbor, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ while the log is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor’s eye.” — Matthew 7.1-5

I don’t accept the currently fashionable assertion that any view is automatically as worthy of respect as any equal and opposite view. — Douglas Adams (1952-2001, English)

*People bind themselves into political teams that share moral narratives. Once they accept a particular narrative, they become blind to alternative moral worlds. — Jonathan Haidt (b. 1963), *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People are Divided by Politics and Religion**

There’s so much energy in our lives spent trying to be on “the right side.” Maybe it’s our competitive nature, or a source of pride, or the desire to find fault...which often lands on whomever is on the *other* side, along with giving thanks that “we’re not like those other people.”

Once someone, or some people, are put on “the other side of the tracks,” they’re more easy to blame or demonize. Something’s wrong with *them*. But there’s a

better way, a more honest way, a path that demands humility: to see the divisions in our world revealing that there's something wrong with *us*.

We are a tribal people, but the danger is that we think in our world there must be winners and losers, rather living out the motto “we’re all in this together.” The difference among us, the variety of perspectives and experiences each of us brings, are a gift to be cherished. As we meet the challenges of our time, we must find ways to work together for the good of all, not just some.

Think of the story of Saul, who was thoroughly convinced God was on his side and, if so, against the “others,” the Christ-followers. And then this same Christ met Saul on the road to Damascus, where a greater Truth was revealed. Saul was blind, but then Paul could see.

We are all Saul needing to become Paul — to pray that God would come to us, perhaps not as dramatically, but giving us the eyes of faith to seek God’s will, not our own. Isn’t that our prayer every day?

God is not the God of a political party, or nation, or denomination. God so loved the world (I’m pretty sure that includes everyone) that our work as the church is to see beyond what divides us, receiving anew each day the Spirit who unites us, and to share this good news — that indeed God is on *our* side — with all.

—Pastor Peter

Prayer: *Spirit of hope, we seek to speak and live your truth. Correct us where we err, and strengthen us where we are right, always seeking the good of the neighbor and justice for the oppressed. May we continue the work of reconciliation, understanding, and peace. Amen.*

Music Link:

With God on Our Side (1963) — Bob Dylan (b. 1941).

*Oh my name it ain't nothin' My age it means less
The country I come from Is called the Midwest
I was taught and brought up there The laws to abide
And that land that I live in Has God on its side*

*Oh, the history books tell it They tell it so well
The cavalries charged The Indians fell*

*The cavalries charged The Indians died
Oh, the country was young With God on its side*

*The Spanish-American War had its day
And the Civil War, too Was soon laid away
And the names of the heroes I was made to memorize
With guns in their hands And God on their side*

*The First World War, boys It came and it went
The reason for fighting I never did get
But I learned to accept it Accept it with pride
For you don't count the dead When God's on your side*

*The Second World War Came to an end
We forgave the Germans And then we were friends
Though they murdered six million In the ovens they fried
The Germans now, too Have God on their side*

*I've learned to hate the Russians All through my whole life
If another war comes It's them we must fight
To hate them and fear them To run and to hide
And accept it all bravely With God on my side*

*But now we got weapons Of chemical dust
If fire them, we're forced to Then fire, them we must
One push of the button And a shot the world wide
And you never ask questions When God's on your side*

*Through many a dark hour I've been thinkin' about this
That Jesus Christ was Betrayed by a kiss
But I can't think for you You'll have to decide
Whether Judas Iscariot Had God on his side*

*So now as I'm leavin' I'm weary as Hell
The confusion I'm feelin' Ain't no tongue can tell
The words fill my head And fall to the floor
That if God's on our side He'll stop the next war*