

**ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S ANGLICAN PRO-CATHEDRAL IN THE TOWN OF TONAWANDA**

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Scripture: Various

***"The Sleeping Giant Gets a Wake-up Call! – How Will You Respond?"***

**HERE WE GO AGAIN!**

In ten days we will be electing a new president. And whoever is elected will exert great influence on our nation. This individual will set the course on how we address the problems facing our world and how we handle the crises that inevitably come.

Unfortunately, the two choices we have before us do not inspire most people. Both have disapproval ratings of over 60%. Worse, they are not good role models for our children. And the way they have run their campaigns and conducted themselves has to rank up there as the worst in American history. And my friends, there is a reason for this.

**THE PRESENT SPIRIT IN OUR LAND**

They simply reflect the dominant spirit in our land. And what is that spirit? The same one what was in the garden at the beginning. The same spirit that seduced Adam and Eve. The spirit that says, "Did God really say that?" You don't have to listen to God. He is holding you back. You can do it without Him. You can be somebody *without* Him. Oh, it's ok to acknowledge him, he obviously is there. But you need to be in charge. You need to call the shots. You can be the master of your own domain.

That message - but it is more than just a message - it's a spirit! And that spirit controls the media – whether it be Hollywood, the News, Sports, the business world – Wall Street, the advertising industry; the educational system; the law and the courts, and the political establishment from Washington to Albany to main street, USA. And sadly it is a spirit that has even crept into the church.

It shouldn't surprise us that this spirit is so pervasive. For who is the god of this world? The Bible tells us – Satan. **2 Cor. 4:4 – *"the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving."***

I have said it before, America's problem is not a political problem, it is not an economic problem, it's not a military problem, not an educational problem, America's problem is a spiritual problem. The spirit of the country is not right. And if the spirit is not right, nothing else will be right.

This was not always the case. There was a time that the spirit of America was right - when we heard the words for the first time, "*We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness*" were penned and proclaimed so that the whole world would hear; when the the Bills of Rights and US Constitution was written and ratified by the Congress. When President Lincoln declared in his Gettysburg Address, "*that these dead shall not have died in vain - that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom -- and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.*" The spirit was right when President Roosevelt and Prime Minister Winston Churchill took part in a joint Christian service of worship on the deck of the *HMS Prince of Wales* in 1941 a few months before Pearl Harbor. It was right when Martin Luther King Jr. took to the steps of

the Lincoln Memorial and said *"I have a dream...when all of God's children, black men and white men, Jews and gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual, "Free at last! Free at last! Thank God Almighty, we are free at last!"*

You see America has always had serious problems but we had the spiritual conviction and foundation to address those problems. The sin of tyranny, we addressed it. The sin of slavery. We addressed it. The sin of heartless industry. We addressed it. The sin of Nazism and communism. We addressed it. The sin of racism. We addressed it.

But today the spiritual foundation is crumbling. And the challenges and problems we face will become even greater if the foundation isn't restored. Make no mistake, Satan has his sights on the United States of America. For as the United States goes, so goes the world.

But why did the United States have such a solid foundation? It wasn't just its governing documents; it was because of its people. And what was true of its people? Even though we were of many ethnic backgrounds, those who founded and built our republic were followers of the Lord Jesus Christ. They may not have all gotten along, but the truths of God's Word and the teachings of Jesus Christ were the bedrock for all aspects of our society – from the courts to the schools to the legislatures to the theatres to the armed services. God's Word was the foundation!

And so really as goes the Church of Jesus Christ, so will go the United States of America. You see, the foundation of our nation is the church, the people following Christ; and the foundation of the church is Jesus Himself. But if Christ is not the Church's foundation, then its foundation will crumble.

Now I have entitled this sermon, *"The Sleeping Giant Gets a Wake-up Call."* Who is the Sleeping Giant? – it is both our nation – for our nation in many respects has been put to sleep by all the busyness of life – all the entertainment, gadgets, running to and fro, trying to make ends meet. And the other Sleeping Giant? The Church. How many Christians stayed home during the election of 2012? 30 million to be exact!

### **HOW SHOULD WE RESPOND?**

You say, "Fr. Ward, I feel overwhelmed." I agree, it is easy to feel that way, but I believe God is not as concerned about us looking at what happens as He is with how will respond to what is happening? In other words, while we look at life as what has happened to us, the greater issue is how we respond? As someone has rightfully observed, life is 10% what happens and 90% how we respond to it. We can see that in how God has designed life.

Look back at the account in the Garden with Adam and Eve. We see that God creates a garden, makes man and woman, puts them in the garden, and gives them everything they need. He also has a tree that is in the middle of the garden that is off limits. How will they respond? Their response dictates everything! They did not trust God first in their hearts and then they disobeyed Him and then they suffered the consequences of their actions. We are free to choose, but we are not free to choose the consequences. The consequences choose for us.

God is giving us a wake-up call. The dysfunction of this election is a wake-up call. 9/11 was a wake-up call. How will respond, individually and corporately as the body of Christ? That is what I want us to reflect on during the coming days before this election.

#### **FOUR KEY RESPONSES**

Individually, I want us to consider four things. First, what do we do with our anger? This election unfortunately has been driven by anger. People are upset and rightfully so. But it is what we do with our anger that is most important. The Bible says in **Eph. 4:26, *Be angry, but do not sin.*** It is ok to be angry but it is what you do with your anger that is most important. It is why we are also told that ***"the anger of man does not accomplish the righteousness of God."*** **James 1:20,** Anger that is emotionally driven and vengeance motivated will only lead to more problems. It is like throwing fuel on the fire.

Instead, we hear from **Proverbs 15:18:** ***"A hot-tempered man stirs up strife, but the slow to anger brings calm."***

Regardless of who wins this election, our nation will be severely divided. We will need to work together as a nation to tackle the problems we face. What better way than for the church to show unity and calm. What better way than for it to begin with us in here, in our hearts, in our families with those around us. Again, the anger of man will never accomplish the righteousness of God!

Second, are we in control of our tongues? If this election has taught us anything, it is the power of the spoken word. Words have great power in their effects. God made it so. We find the model right at the beginning of Creation when God said, ***"Let there be light!"*** Jesus Christ is called the Word for a reason. You see, words not only express ideas, but they propel ideas into reality. That is why the old saying, "Sticks and stones will break my bones, but names will never hurt me is not always true." What we do say does impact others. That is why parents need to be careful how they correct and address their children. We never want to tear down a person's spirit or soul.

Please turn now to **James 3:1-12.** The Apostle James writes, ***"Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment."*** That can go for politicians, too! Anyone who is in a leadership position and communicates to others needs to be very careful concerning what is said. Both presidential candidates have demonstrated a lack of discipline when it comes to their tongues! ***2For we all stumble in many ways. If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body as well. 3Now if we put the bits into the horses' mouths so that they will obey us, we direct their entire body as well. 4Look at the ships also, though they are so great and are driven by strong winds, are still directed by a very small rudder wherever the inclination of the pilot desires. 5So also the tongue is a small part of the body, and yet it boasts of great things."*** Our tongues and what we say not only arises from the heart but can set in motion our entire life!

We now read, ***"See how great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire! 6And the tongue is a fire, the very world of iniquity; the tongue is set among our members as that which defiles the entire body, and sets on fire the course of our life, and is set on fire by hell. 7For every species of beasts and birds, of reptiles and creatures of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by the human race. 8But no one can tame the tongue; it is a restless evil and full of deadly poison. 9With it we bless our Lord and Father,***

*and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God;10from the same mouth come both blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be this way. 11Does a fountain send out from the same opening both fresh and bitter water?12Can a fig tree, my brethren, produce olives, or a vine produce figs? Nor can salt water produce fresh."*

The simple truth is that our tongues reflect our human nature; and unless we are under the control of Christ, our words will be self-centered and negative. They will be of the flesh, not of the Spirit. We all know that it is very easy to say the wrong thing or let our emotions get the best of us and let our mouths run. It must not be so if we are to reflect the love of Christ and speak out His truth. Before you utter a word, consider these four questions? 1) Is it truthful? 2) Is it kind? 3) Is it confidential? 4) Is it necessary?

Third, there is an attitude that should be part of our everyday life. We find it in **1 Thessalonians 5:15-18**: *"See that no one repays another with evil for evil, but always seek after that which is good for one another and for all people. Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."* The attitude should be one that seeks the good of others, and this attitude flows from being in communion with God. To be in communion with God means to be in active relationship with Him. And if we are in active relationship with the Lord, our prayer life will be an everyday reality. Prayer is communicating with the Lord by listening and speaking to Him. Notice the words Paul uses here – "all," "always," "without ceasing," and "in everything." The true follower of Jesus Christ will not only seek to control his/her anger and tongues and then use them for good, but the true follower of Christ will be in daily conversation and obedience to God. When God speaks, He expects us to listen and to truly listen, means that we will obey Him! But it all begins in our prayer life. And our prayer life is not merely saying prayers. It is as Paul writes in **Ephesians 6:18**, *"always being on the alert with prayer and petition for the needs of the saints."* It means spending time with the Lord and making sure we are on the "same page" as He is. And to be on the "same page" means knowing His Word! It also means remembering to be grateful for all that God has done, is doing, and will do in our lives. When one has an attitude of gratitude, it is hard to get depressed!

Finally, we need to know the issues of the day, the candidate's views, and we need to vote. Even if you don't like the two candidates for President, vote for all those below them. We live in a nation where we have the privilege of voting for our leaders. Some may say, "I don't think it really matters to the Lord whether or not we vote." I believe that such thinking is wrong. The freedom to vote is not only a privilege, but it is a responsibility. It is a privilege and responsibility that over a million of our citizens have given their lives for. God wants us to make a difference in the lives of others, and we can do that by whom we put in charge of our government. What better way than for Christians to vote their values? Some say that often it seems to be a choice between the lesser of two evils, so why bother? Well, if you had a choice between having your arm cut or your arm cut off, which of the two evils would you choose? I think we know the answer. So go vote! In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, AMEN!