

Rev. Anne J. Scalfaro
7 June 2024

10:30 a.m. MT Worship
Seventh Sunday after Pentecost

Calvary Baptist Church
Denver, Colorado

“Together, We Believe: In Cultivating a Spirit of Curiosity”

Second sermon in *Part II: Together, We Believe*
of the summer series: *Together, We are Community*

Joel 2:28; Matthew 16:13-15; Ephesians 3:18-21

New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition

NOTE: A sermon is a spoken word event. This manuscript served as a guide but is not exact to what was preached in the moment.

Curiosity is one of the greatest gifts of our humanity. And I agree with Albert Einstein, who once said when talking about the mysteries of life, “never lose a holy curiosity.”¹ Curiosity is holy, or sacred. Holy/sacred literally meaning “set apart or separated.” You see, when we are curious, that is when we stop long enough to not react automatically to something or to not just regurgitate the answer we’ve always given, but when we stop and truly separate from those reflexes so that we don’t just see what we’ve always seen, or say what we’ve always said, or hear what we always hear...when we actually allow ourselves to have a moment of curiosity, it does set us apart. Curiosity sets us apart from what we think we know and gives us a wee bit of distance or perspective. Even if we do not ultimately change our mind, just the reflection allows us to be

more grounded in what we think or believe. In short, curiosity allows us to consider something we may not yet know, sometimes forces us to engage in some skepticism, doubt, questioning, or confusion, and often gives us time to sit in awe or wonder. Sometimes curiosity gives us just enough pause to say, “*Huh?*” or “*Hmm...*”

Curiosity is evident all throughout Scripture.

In Exodus, we learn how Moses’ curiosity literally stops him in his tracks as he wonders why a bush is on fire and burning, yet not consumed by the flames. The whole encounter ultimately leads to a whole new direction and purpose for Moses’ life, and even more, to a curious revelation about God’s identity. God says to Moses: אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה / *'ehye 'ăšer 'ehye* / which could mean any

¹ Albert Einstein: Statement to William Miller, as quoted in LIFE magazine on May 2, 1955.

number of things because Hebrew grammar is sometimes ambiguous, but most commonly:

I AM who I AM.

I AM what I AM.

I WILL BE who I WILL BE.

I create what(ever) I create.

I will become what I choose to become.

Even the way God defines Godself to Moses leaves plenty of room for curiosity. Almost as if God, like us, is curious about God's own nature!

Then there are the prophets like Joel, who invited his people to use curiosity as a tool to help them in the midst of trauma, inviting them to dream of a world beyond the one they saw before them. You see, at the time of Joel's prophetic writings, the Israelites' physical world had literally just been destroyed by four different kinds of locusts. Joel 1:4: "*What the cutting locust left, the swarming locust has eaten. What the swarming locust left, the hopping locust has eaten, and what the hopping locust left, the destroying locust has eaten.*" That's a lot of locusts and whether we're talking about a real deal insect plague, or a metaphor for invading armies and conquering powers, this hits a little too close to home right

now as Damon and I are reckoning with the Japanese beetles destroying our roses and Calla lilies!

In any case, the devastation caused by this relentless invasion of locusts is so severe that Joel says every strata of society is affected: drunkards (Joel 1:5-7), citizens of Jerusalem (Joel 1:8-10), farmers (Joel 1:11-12), and priests (Joel 1:13). So with nothing left (literally) before them, God reminds the people through the prophet Joel that a spirit of curiosity and dreaming can give life where there only seems to be death: "*I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions.*"

If you're thinking, I feel like I heard that text recently...you did! This is the very text that the disciple Peter uses in his very first sermon, which we always read on Pentecost Sunday, the sermon that follows the Sweeping of the Spirit upon the people of God. Peter quotes the prophet Joel, reminding people that even though Jesus is no longer in their physical presence, his vision remains, and the Spirit is sweeping in to

provoke the people to keep dreaming, keep visioning, keep looking beyond the present experience of Jesus being gone to the bigger experience to which God is calling them to of a fuller vision of the kin-dom of God where they each play a crucial role.

From Moses to the prophets, we move to Jesus. Jesus asked questions (307 to be exact!) as his preferred method of teaching, showing us that the discovery of Truth begins with curiosity, and it begins with our own active engagement with our beliefs and our faith. We don't just passively accept what's been handed to us in the past, we engage with our faith ourselves and we do as former Senior Pastor Larry Loughhead encouraged us to do at the end of every sermon, we "*Think about that.*"

We see in today's gospel text in Matthew that Jesus asked his disciples to think for themselves, to get curious about their *own* beliefs: "*Yes, I understand that you know who everyone else is saying I am John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, but who do YOU say that I am?*" What is your experience of me? What is the revelation *you* have that the rest

of the world doesn't? What have *you* seen and heard?

And then we have the Apostle Paul, who reminds us in his letter to the Ephesians that in seeking to comprehend and know the *Love of Christ*, we will come to know the fullness of God and we'll be invited into God's kin-dom work beyond what we could imagine on our own. That is, when we fully embody the kind of love that Christ embodied in his life and share that love with the world unequivocally, then God will do things *within* us and *through* us and *for* us that we cannot yet even fathom or imagine...and not just for, through, and in *us*, but for/in/and through *generations* to come! This is *Good News!* Curiosity opens the doorway to hope!

Indeed, having a "Spirit of Curiosity" is a *central invitation* and a *central spiritual practice* in the Story of God and God's People.

In this middle section of our summer series, *Together, We are Community*, we are re-visiting a few themes from recent years that really speak to what we believe as a community. Last week we re-visited the core belief of

Belovedness. This week, I want to remind you of the value and importance in **Cultivating a Spirit of Curiosity**. For our beliefs, yes, but perhaps more importantly, for HOW our beliefs inform our lives, and—because it’s the week of July 4th and we’re coming off of a presidential debate that left the country reeling—yes, how our beliefs inform our politics too.

As Monica Guzmán writes in her book, *I Never Thought of It That Way: How to Have Fearlessly Curious Conversations in Dangerously Divided Times*, “*The problem isn’t the partial answers we’re always collecting from a variety of sources in our busy lives. It’s the questions we stop asking because we think we’ve learned enough.*” And I’d add: or because we think we’ve heard it all or we assume we know where someone is coming from. And certainly in our political climate it can feel like we’ve heard it ‘all’ from the “other side” and it’s all bad, chaotic, devastating, and scary, and—trust me—I think that way too many days. So work really, really hard at curiosity when it comes to politics, and it’s not easy. But it’s oh so important.

Guzman points out that curiosity is not a personality trait that some have and some do not. Curiosity is a practice that can be cultivated, meaning, we can learn it, re-learn it, and allow it to grow us, change us, expand our minds, deepen our hearts. Sure, some of us by virtue of our personality or proclivities may naturally be slightly more curious than others. But curiosity is a continuum, and wherever we are on the continuum, we can grow and increase our level of curiosity, and the intentionality with which it becomes a regular spiritual practice in our lives.

Why would we want curiosity to be a spiritual practice? Because 1) when we are curious, we are more humble, realizing that we do not have all the answers and that we might be able to learn something from others.

Curiosity is an antidote to hubris and pride.

2) When we are curious, we have more compassion for others, realizing that there are many ways people see the world and that their values are driving how they see, just as our values drive how we see. Just this recognition can build a bridge to common ground.

3) When we are curious, we are actively engaged in our world,

not letting things happen to us passively, but realizing that our curiosity can drive change, real transformation. Think of Jesus telling the disciples to be engaged in their own faith, *Who do YOU say that I am?*

And 4) When we are curious, we cultivate the space necessary for dreaming and imagining, which is a key call in what it means to follow Christ. From the prophets to Paul, we are called to dream, imagine, be curious, and keep cultivating and co-creating until those dreams become reality, a reality we call the ‘kin-dom of God.’

And we only get to God’s dream for our world, by loosening our grip on the reality we’ve insisted on for our world...which brings us full circle back to humility!

When we seek to be curious and understand something more deeply about ourselves, others, or God—rather than assume or rely only on previous knowledge or experience—we grow in compassion, empathy, and understanding. When practiced with intention, with a spirit that seeks to explore rather than exploit, curiosity can build a bridge across divides that we previously thought were

uncrossable, leading us to people who hold perspectives very different than us. But the point is, we focus more on them being *people* than on the perspectives that they hold. Our politics often remove PEOPLE from the center and instead place perspectives at the center, opinions. But People must always be at the heart of all of our politics, because people, *real flesh and blood people*, are the ones whose lives are affected by policies and decisions made in the halls of our government.

This has never been more important to remember given our political climate. The differences in perspective are not just felt by us in our guts, or known in our own experience. The differences are backed up by statistics.

“New polling from Pew Research² shows how extremely far apart Republicans and Democrats are today on a range of social issues. The gaps are staggering, not even close, revealing how supporters of Joe Biden and Donald Trump see the world in almost polar

² Pew Research Center, “Cultural Issues and the 2024 Election: (June 6, 2024), accessed on July 7, 2024 at

<https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2024/06/06/cultural-issues-and-the-2024-election/>.

opposite ways.³ This data is from a survey of 8,709 adults, conducted April 8-14 of this year and from gun violence to slavery to gender equity to religious liberty and sexual orientation, [to immigration, to health care, to military spending], Democrats and Republicans express views that are often 50 to 70 points apart.”⁴

One of the biggest differences I am notice is related to religious liberty, and the way one party overtly supports (or at the very least does not condemn) he rise in Christian Nationalism.

In listening to a talk on *Christianity and Politics*⁵ this week, given by my pastor and mentor, Dr. George Mason, who co-leads Faith Commons, a non-profit organization that lifts up interfaith voices in the public square for the common good, I

was reminded of the fact that while there is one Jesus, there are many Christianities, and it does us good to acknowledge that reality. Just as there are different expressions of Islam and Judaism, even different expressions of atheism and ‘spiritual but not religious’—there are different expressions of Christianity, and we must be a strong voice for the expression we embody, lest the world only see and hear the voice(s) that are the loudest and most dominate.

Because here’s the tricky thing, many of these versions of Christianity in our country have history and precedent in our country, including Christian Nationalism. So, it does us no good to deny that and just call it a Trump-era phenomena or something that culminated on January 6, 2021. There are extreme versions of Christian

³ Among the highlights: T = Trump Supporters / B = Biden Supporters

Does the legacy of slavery affect the position of Black people in America today a great deal or a fair amount? 27% of T say yes, 79% of B say yes.

Can someone be a man or a woman even if that is different from the sex they were assigned at birth? 9% of T say yes, 59% of B say yes.

Was the U.S. Supreme Court right to legalize same-sex marriage? 57% of B say yes, which is five times as many of the 11% of T who say yes.

Is America’s openness to people all over the world essential to who we are as a nation? 87% of B say yes, 36% of T say yes.

Should there be a “national effort to deport” people who are in the U.S. illegally? Nearly two-thirds of T (63%) support a national effort to deport all those in the country illegally, compared with just 11% of B.

Does gun ownership increase safety by allowing law-abiding citizens to protect themselves? 86% of T say yes, in contrast to 23% of B.

Is the criminal justice system “not tough enough on criminals” or does it treat criminals about right? T (81%) are twice as likely as B (40%) to say the criminal justice system is not tough enough on criminals.

Should abortion be legal in all or most cases? Yes, says 88% of B, compared to 38% of T.

Should religion be kept separate from government policies? 86% of T say yes, 56% of B say yes.

⁴ Mark Wingfield, “Democrats and Republicans are miles apart on social issues,” *Baptist News Global* (July 4, 2024), accessed on July 7, 2024 at <https://baptistnews.com/article/democrats-and-republicans-are-miles-apart-on-social-issues/>.

⁵ Dr. George Mason, “Talking Faith: Christianity and Politics,” *Good God Project* (July 1, 2024), accessed on July 6, 2024 at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ut1FfZWmiHQ>.

Nationalism, but if we're self-reflective, we'll see how it lives in us in more subtle ways. Anything that is majority culture, *and Christianity is still majority culture in this country!*, means that if we are in that majority culture, we likely hold prejudice or bias against other views. So, it's time for us all to get curious. Because Christian Nationalism is scary. And honestly, as George reminded us in the lecture, so is the alternative—a society where science and technology rule and religion has no place or purpose.

I wish I had time to give you a whole history on the roots of Christian Nationalism and Enlightenment and the separation of church state, and like matters, but I don't. However, if you want more, email me and I'll send you the link to George's talk.

For now, know this. The origins of Christian Nationalism, or a 'uniting of the Christian religion and government' have precedence in our country with the Puritans and the Massachusetts Bay Colony. These folks were trying to establish something quite different than what the Church

of England had forced on them, religiously speaking. These Puritans were Calvinists, which means they were highly concerned with the Sovereignty of God. They wanted to establish a religious focus in their new colony the 'right way' since they felt like the Church of England had done it the 'wrong way.' They wanted to ensure God's absolute leading and ruling in ALL sectors of society—government, education, business, law, medicine, and the like. There was no separation of church and state because you can't separate God from anything.⁶ [This, by the way, is why we have things like the laws that are being passed in Texas, Louisiana, and Oklahoma related to the Ten Commandments and the Bible in public schools!]

From the past to our present, the definitions have varied, however, "Religious scholars, sociologists and others who study Christian nationalism describe it as a belief that the United States is a country defined by Christianity. In practice, this means:

- The government should take steps to keep the country's Christian roots and identity intact.

⁶ Mason, *ibid.*

- The government should advocate Christian values and pass laws and enact policies that reflect those values.
- The separation of church and state is not a formal law that should be followed.
- God’s plan is for the U.S. to be a successful nation based in Christian ideals [and involving Christian leadership at the highest levels].”⁷

That last point is really important as it speaks to the zeal we see, the fervor, for Christian Nationalism and the belief that those who espouse this truly believe it is God’s will. They feel a responsibility for all people to know God and live under God’s law. Yet, given their use of Scripture and God to defend everything, you can see how Christian Nationalism is also laced with white supremacy and land theft and enslavement and practices where “God” is used to define for others “the law.” And who’s doing the defining? Usually white, straight, cis-gender men. It makes sense they drive this movement, because even within the movement they are the ones with power and privilege.

⁷ Scott A. Leadingham, “What Is Christian Nationalism? The Complete Guide,” *Freedom Forum*, accessed on

But you see, what starts as “good intentions” for all to abide by God’s law with the Puritans, ends up with laws that force people or coerce other people into practices done ‘in the name of God’ that almost always do not reflect the God they know or believe in, if they even believe in a god!

The Puritans of the Massachusetts Bay Colony wanted freedom FROM the religion of the Church of England, but neglected to realize that freedom FROM necessitates freedom FOR...and the freedom FOR Some Religion or the freedom FOR No Religion is where personal choice comes in...something we Baptists believe very strongly in!

And, as George points out, it wasn’t just Massachusetts with the Congregationalists. The Catholics did the same thing in Maryland, the Quakers in Pennsylvania. People settled in different commonwealths and had different established religions.

All of this is to say, uniting government with religion has a

long history in our country, and it explains why this notion still remains so strongly and why people still think this way.

There were definitely Christian people seeking to establish a Christian country, from the very beginning. It is part of our origin story. And this, too, is important to remember, in trying to have a charitable view of this mindset: In the entire history of the world up until this point, there was always a sense that there was an established religion and church and state were together. So “when we find that people today want to have a Christian nation and build an argument for it, we should understand that this idea of an American democracy with separation of church and state is still a very young idea. And what comes last, goes first. When people are anxious, the tendency is for people to revert to what they have known, even if it’s not conscious.”⁸ They lose curiosity, and cling to a certainty that they think is serving all, but it’s only serving themselves, because it’s not listening or honoring or respecting others. It lacks humility; it lives on hubris.

So, hopefully you can understand, at least a little bit, the roots of Christian nationalism in our country. It dominates one religion and one way of understanding God over all else. America is not the only country that struggles with this. We see it all over the world with state-mandated religion. And it’s not just far-right folks who struggles with this either. If we are honest with ourselves, many of us who are Christian, harbor some Christian nationalism within us, a preference for the Christian faith and leaders that share it, even if we don’t admit that. We gravitate to the familiar, and because we do, we must be vigilant to ensure our practices are living up to our ideals.

Okay, so that’s one strand in our history. The other, pushes against it, reacting to it to keep it ‘in check,’ so to speak. But it too, can go to an extreme.

This second stream of American history comes from the Enlightenment. America was not just founded by Christians, America was founded by people who believe that reason, not religion should govern society.

⁸ Mason, *ibid.*

As George explained, Enlightenment thinkers from Decartes onward struggled with the fact that the Church had “exclusive claim” on truth. So in the 18th century onward we had this movement that said humans could use reason to discover truth through the scientific process, and embraced a sense of human mastery over the world. So “if the other group was all about the Sovereignty of God, this approach was all the Sovereignty of Man.”⁹

“The Enlightenment thinkers gave rise to the revolutions in France and America that moved the church out of the position of authority and nobility. John Locke’s idea of individual rights was encoded in our Bill of rights. Voltaire’s idea of separation of church and state, was French originally, but we took a version of it. So, there is a very strong Enlightenment, rational view of life in our country’s history that says we do not need to make reference to God or religion in order to make sense of society. This is also part of our American story.”¹⁰

It's a strand that liberal Christians tend to embrace, as well as the growing percentage

(30%) of people who identify as Nones (those who do not claim a faith tradition or religious community.) The hubris in THIS strand of our history is extreme intellectual. The belief that we humans, through our reason and rational, can know all we need to know about the world. In this way of thinking, people lookdown on religion saying we don’t need to have truth from religion to live our lives well or move forward in life. We’ll just operate with the scientific method, thank you very much. *(Which is kind of ironic, given that method is based on faith in a theory or a hypothesis...)*¹¹

We sometimes call this more Enlightened version of our religious history “the Progressives,” and it’s especially true for white, liberal progressives. Latinx and African American progressives have often had a more integrated understand of the role of faith in politics.

In any case, these “progressives” tend to say religion needs to stay out of education, medicine, politics, because those things are based on science and reason and

⁹ Mason, *ibid.*

¹⁰ Mason, *ibid.*

¹¹ Mason, *ibid.*

rational. And a lot of us in liberal Christian traditions have conceded this point and we say ‘we believe in science’ – which also means, through the years, in our predominately white Christian churches, as George mentions, “we’ve said we’re going to stay in the area of psychology and personal faith and family, but we’re not going to get into whether the budget of our city is a moral document because that’s not our lane. We don’t want to ruffle the feathers of the business people and elected leaders in our pews, so we sort of separate out church from the rest of our lives, and what happens on Sunday, doesn’t affect what happens Monday through Saturday.”¹²

And, as George says so aptly, as liberals and progressive people of faith have done this, *we have conceded too much*. There can’t be that much separation between secular and sacred. Our faith matters for our politics. Not in terms of enforcing belief on others, but in terms of our faith informing our policies: does how we vote reflect love of neighbor? Do our city budgets prioritize the marginalized and the vulnerable? And the same

questions can be asked of the church as well.¹³

The Enlightenment Era gave us the separation of church and state, and that is definitely a positive contribution that we celebrate. And—it also gets us in trouble when it doesn’t admit that there are more sources of truth and life that come through other means (including Christianity and other religions and spiritualities as well). As George says, “Science can deal really well with matters of cause and effect, ‘*how*’ things are. Religion adds the meaning of purpose, the discussion of ‘*why*’ things are, and what they’re meant for,” or what they inspire us toward.¹⁴

Here’s the hope though...rooted in curiosity! The push and pull of these two approaches can lead us to a third way.

If Enlightenment (separation of church and state, and knowledge/reason keeps faith in its own lane) was one approach AND the Puritan approach was another (the complete unity of government and religion), there is a third way, a more rooted way, a radical way (the root of the word radical is related to the

¹² Mason, *ibid.*

¹³ Mason, *ibid.*

¹⁴ Mason, *ibid.*

actual word ‘root’, by the way, that is to say, it ‘takes into account all that is around it), a centered way, where religion and politics can belong together.¹⁵

This third way is a Spirit of Committed Pluralism, where religion has a role/voice in society, but no one religion dominates. No religion is a state religion or forced, but everyone is free to act/speak/vote/make policies rooted in the values of *their* religious convictions! This is what our Baptist ancestors did, they were separatists or dissenters, who believed in the separation of church and state, but still very much believed in the role and values of religions in public life. They said, “If the Church was going to have an authentic community and respond to God, it had to be free from the state. If an individual was going to be free to be responsible to God, then that soul had to be free to respond as well.”¹⁶ And the only way to do this is to embrace religious pluralism and give people freedom of choice FOR a religion or for NO religion.

This is the Baptist spirit. A Spirit of Curiosity. Of humility,

of compassion, of active engagement, of each person grounded in their own religious values to speak truth about what they believe will help the Common Good. It’s why Baptist Roger Williams established the first colony of true religious liberty in the history of the world and called it Providence. When he established the First Baptist Church in Providence, Rhode Island, he then invited Jews, Muslims, seekers, and any others to come and establish congregations and worship freely in Providence. This was a new experiment in religious liberty and would become an incubator for religious liberty in this colonial period for what would become the United States of America.¹⁷

Ultimately this approach would prevail in IDEAL, but we are still struggling to make it our true reality in practice. Perhaps because as we were establishing the ideal in writing, we were simultaneously living without integrity to our stated values. We were saying one thing and doing another. We were not honoring indigenous religious or the religions of the Africans we were enslaving, not to mention we were not honoring their

¹⁵ Mason, *ibid.*

¹⁶ Mason, *ibid.*

¹⁷ Mason, *ibid.*

personhood or freedom. We were promoting white supremacy, even as we said we believed in religious freedom. So white supremacy is embedded in all areas of our country's understanding of church and state, no matter how you look at it.

Again, ultimately, we decided in ideal that we would be a country with no religious tests for religious office (Article 6 of the Constitution). Can anyone tell that we actually say that by the politics that we hear? It's really hard to imagine an atheist or a Muslim or a Jew becoming a President with all the Christian rhetoric we hear. As George so aptly noted, perhaps the true test as to whether we have a free, committed pluralism in our country today is to self-reflect and ask ourselves: how do we react when a Muslim is elected to government office and acts in and through their faith and convictions for the common good? Do we celebrate that and advocate for them, or do we condemn it? Either overtly or covertly? Do we kind of squirm and wonder if it's really okay? Do we doubt them and their motives? Do we worry about the future of our children and if they

will force the Koran on us? Do we think racist thoughts about potential connections to terrorism? Do we fear their faith, or do we find fellowship in the fact that they, too, are leading us out of the beautiful values of their faith?¹⁸

One more thing about this ideal that's important to note, and a great thing to celebrate about our country: this vision we have in the United States, is different than what is set up in France. France had separated religion and government to a point of secularity where they still struggle with it, as there is no accommodation to religion practice. In America, we said we want a robust religious pluralism. Yet again, this is an ideal that we have never yet achieved. Like many of our ideals.¹⁹

As flawed and failed as these ideals are in practice, what with white supremacy, racism, slavery, Jim Crow, issues of unequal rights related to women, gender, sexuality, race, those incarcerated, and more...the ideals we hold, they remain. The dream. That's what King spoke of on the March on Washington in 1963. The

¹⁸ Mason, *ibid.*

¹⁹ Mason, *ibid.*

dream. It's the same dream that the prophet calls us to in Joel and at Pentecost, it's the same imagination that Paul invites us to in Ephesians...something beyond what we see and imagine right before us.

So to be curious about our politics and our faith and how they go together, perhaps we answer the question Jesus posed to his disciples: "*Who do you say that I am?*"

How we see Jesus and how we understand the commandment he lifted to our attention, calling it the greatest, to love God and to love our neighbor as ourself, how we see this challenge and charge will define how we engage our faith with our politics.

The Spirit of Curiosity that Christ continually invites us to, no matter what country we live in or what creed we believe in, is simply this: how is this candidate or this policy honoring and loving our neighbor, how is it centering PEOPLE (not preferences or perspectives), and how is it promoting the rights of the

vulnerable, the marginalized, the oppressed?

As George challenged us in his talk, "The gospel is personal, but it's never private. We want a good society for everyone...The question should not be are we on this team or that team. We're not donkeys or elephants we're doves. We are gospel partisans...no politician is going to perfectly reflect the gospel in their politics, yet we still need to talk about whether one or another approximates that more than another."²⁰

And we can be gospel partisans, while still being patriotic, by the way.

As editor of Baptist News Global, Mark Wingfield wrote this July 4th week: "There is a difference between patriotism and nationalism. Patriotism means loving your country; nationalism means believing your country is superior to all others."²¹

"We must change the narrative to say it is patriotic to object to unnecessary war; it is patriotic to challenge racism; it is patriotic to demand Congress

²⁰ Mason, *ibid.*

²¹ Mark Wingfield, "This Fourth of July, let us reclaim patriotism," *Baptist News Global* (June 30, 2024),

accessed on July 7, 2024 at <https://baptistnews.com/article/this-fourth-of-july-let-us-reclaim-patriotism/>.

actually does its job rather than specialize in obstruction; it is patriotic to want freedom for all people; it is patriotic to welcome immigrants and help them; it is patriotic to want our children safe from gun violence; it is patriotic to oppose religious instruction in public schools; it is patriotic to fight for health care for senior adults, the poor and all those “less fortunate” than us.”²²

This kind of patriotism, this deep kind of love of country, is not something we do in the abstract. It is something that we do in concrete ways...in order to center the PEOPLE.

And so we ask, very specifically in our political decisions: Who benefits from a candidate’s platform or from this specific policy? If the persons benefitting already have power or privilege, then Christ calls us to get curious...to remain in the commandment that to love God IS to love neighbor. And to truly engage our faith in ways that include ALL in our society, and especially the marginalized, the vulnerable, and the oppressed, those with fewer rights or with rights being stripped away by our leaders and courts.

THAT is the filter of curiosity that Christ gives us. PEOPLE. May we use it to dream and imagine and engage.

For if we do, God will truly do more than we can ask or imagine.

Perhaps it is our curiosity that creates the kin-dom of God.

Think about that.

Amen.

²² Wingfield, *ibid.*