

Thinking Christianly About Memorial Day

What comes to mind as you remember Memorial Day. As a kid it was a day off from school and one day longer at the lake in late Spring. As an adult it has been picnics, patriotic music, and listening to stories of those who have served our country. Christians can be thankful for a holiday to remember those who have served their country, but churches should be wary of bringing a national holiday into the service of worship.

Christians share ethnic and national identities. While in Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, male nor female, slave nor free (Gal.3:28), this does not mean that Christian females stop being female, or Christians who are of Chinese descent stop being Chinese. It is by God's grace that we become one in Christ, but that unity is a diversity of tribe, tongue, nation, and people on the earth and in heaven. To be Christian we do not have to renounce our identities.

Christians share an earthly pride that can be a virtue or a vice. It's okay to love your family, the school you go to or went to, your sports team, or your hometown. There are appropriate loves for the Christian. While we are to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and have no other Gods before him, God does not eradicate other loves in the lives of his children. All other loves are made right in proportion to our love for him who is our ultimate love. God never intended us to be so spiritual that we are blind to all of the goodness he places us in the midst of. Therefore, the Christian can rejoice in the God who shares his goodness with us in the family he puts us in, or the country he allows us citizenship or to traverse as a sojourner. It is right to have proper affections for the good God shares with his children. But proper affections and idolatry are not the same thing. We can love a good thing like our family, our school, and our country too much. Pride is a vice when we are making a god after our own image to satisfy our idolatrous desires for family or country.

Allegiance to your country and your God do not have to be at odds. It is not incompatible for a Christian to rejoice with joy unspeakable while singing a hymn on Sunday morning, and to get choked up singing The National Anthem on Monday at a Memorial Day celebration. For a Christian to have a loving loyalty for their country is not a bad thing. A Christian must never have an ultimate loyalty for their country. We must honor, love, and obey God rather than men. But as we honor and obey God we are also to honor and obey those under whose authority we live. Jesus shows that it's possible to honor God and Caesar, "render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's" (Mark 12:1). He did not see that our responsibility to government infringed on our responsibility to God. Our love to God as our supreme authority informs our loving, honoring, and obeying all other authorities in our lives (Romans 13:1ff). The church and the state are not the same, but this does not mean the church should be against the state or 'for the state', but it is possible for a Christian to be a good American or a good Brit, or a good Korean.

God's church is not bound to or by any one nation. God's people have always been, or have always meant to have been, transcultural and transnational (Gen.12:2; Ps.87:1; Isa.49:1; Mt.28:19; Acts 1:1; Rev.7:1) It is possible for Christians to live in countries and support those nations when they do not formally worship the one true God. Churches in America should not be "American churches". Christianity is not a western or American religion. The church is international. There are more Presbyterians in Korea than America. Christianity is not tied to any one nation, so you can be from any nation and worship Jesus, among any other nations who also worship Jesus.

The church is not a good place for patriotism. We should pray for the church and the state (1Timothy 2:1-7). We should pray for the preacher and the President. We should pray for righteousness to triumph over evil. But we must not pray as if God is on the side of America and our particular brand of 'what it means to be American' or on the side of our nation, whichever that may be. God may be on the side of America or China in some and not all of their endeavors. The church is the gathering of all the nations, peoples, tribes, and tongues to worship the

King of all peoples. Our earthly worship is to reflect the worship of heaven. A Memorial Day celebration is the place to wave the flag, and sing "My Country Tis of Thee". The church is where God's Word is read, sung, prayed, and preached, the Sacraments observed, and the people gathered for their common life in Christ Jesus. Memorial Day is a day at home with friends and family, at the lake for a boat ride, or in the park with your community. The Lord's Day is the day for God's children to gather and worship in Spirit and truth. In church we sing of the glories of Jesus. At the park we sing of the nation. The church cannot ask Koreans, Chinese, Mexican, and South Africans to pledge allegiance to a flag that is not theirs. The church are those washed in the blood of Jesus, clothed in his righteousness, bound together in the unity of the Spirit, as worshipers from every tribe, tongue, and nation. The church cannot say, "You're allowed to worship in our church as long as you love American as much as we do ." Nor is the church able to say, "You can only worship here if you love every other country but your own." But the church can say, 'We worship and love because he first loved us, and so with gratitude we offer ourselves in loving service to our neighbors wherever he has placed us in his providence.' In this way the church can worship the living God in spirit and truth on Sunday in worship together, and celebrate Memorial Day on Monday in love toward our neighbors.

Catalyst Prayer Theme #8 Community

Catalyst Prayer is a season (April - June) of corporate and private prayer for the Vision and Mission of CCC, and her future planning. Please pray with us privately and corporately by using the weekly "Catalyst Prayer Theme".

The Mission and Vision of Christ Covenant Church are centered in the gospel of Jesus Christ. We are praying through our Vision: CCC exists to participate in a movement of the gospel that will bring personal conversion and renewal, community formation, and generous lives serving others through humble cultural engagement in Columbia and beyond.

Our Vision is what we long to see. Therefore, we pray trusting God together for a movement of his gospel that will bring about community formation in this particular body of Christ.

Pray that we will have love for one another. A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. - John 13:34; Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. - Romans 12:10

Pray that we will walk in community worthy of the calling we have received in Christ Jesus. I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. - Ephesians 4:1-3

Pray that we will share our lives with one another in worship, life, and ministry together. And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved. - Acts 2:42-47

Pray that community will be formed around speaking truth and encouraging one another in truth to grow into maturity in Jesus Christ. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, - Ephesians 4:15; But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. - Hebrews 3:13

Pray that community will be formed through the mutual sharing of gifts and graces in Christ Jesus. For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness. - Romans 12:3-8