

With the Independence Day holiday yesterday, our nation takes time off from work to celebrate the freedoms which we enjoy in this great nation of ours. One of the special ways that we would have liked to celebrate this holiday is with a public fireworks display. We truly would like to celebrate our nation's birthday with great fanfare. But not everything in our nation is a cause for celebration. We are in the midst of a pandemic that seems to be getting worse now, after we thought we had it under control. The political scene is extremely polarized and nasty. There are forest fires. There have been tornadoes. And list goes on. So we wonder why — why has God allowed these things to affect so much of our nation? Is God punishing us for some sins which we have committed? While we cannot know the mind of God, we may have a clue in the words which God spoke through the prophet Amos. As we listen to what Amos has to say, we realize that **GOD IS CALLING OUR NATION TO REPENTANCE**. So on this weekend when our thoughts are centered on the nation in which we live, let us look at our nation's call to repentance. We shall see that the Lord speaks to us in a very vivid language, and then He wants us to react to the message which He has given to us.

Our government is a great gift which our heavenly Father has given in order to bless us and keep us safe. So it is fitting and proper on this weekend that we give thanks to God for all of the blessings which He showers upon us through this great nation of ours. We have the freedom to worship our God without the fear of punishment. We have the freedom to spread this gospel message to others so that they may also come to know their Savior. We have peace and prosperity (even in this pandemic) within our borders, and these are truly great blessings.

Yet, that does not mean that our nation is perfect. In fact, we all know that our nation is far from perfect. Fewer and fewer people are considering attending worship as important. Legalization of things which God calls sin is happening at a rapid pace, as sin is being considered normal. In other words, our nation, like so many others in the past, has been turning away from the Lord our God. So listen to what the Lord said through the prophet Amos to Israel when they were turning away from Him: **“Go to Bethel and sin; go to Gilgal and sin yet more. Bring your sacrifices every morning, your tithes every three years. Burn leavened bread as a thank offering and brag about your freewill offerings — boast about them, you Israelites, for this what you love to do, declares the Sovereign Lord.”** (v4-5)

Instead of stopping the Israelites from sinning, the Lord told them to continue on their merry way, doing all of those things which were not pleasing to Him. They were guilty of openly sinning against the Lord, even while they proclaimed that they were continuing to worship Him. But even in their worship they were disobeying Him, offering sacrifices with leaven in them even when the Lord forbade that. Then they would boast to one another about how religious they were, when all they were doing was putting on an outward show, without their hearts being in it. The Lord said that He was not going to stop them from doing that, but they were only hurting themselves. In our nation, we are guilty of doing many of the same things. The sins against the sixth commandment are open and blatant. We are becoming more and more self-centered instead of loving and caring about others. That is coupled with greed for more and more earthly possessions. Our courts are consistently siding with those who reject God's guidelines for our life. All the while proclaiming that we are a Christian nation — even having the inscription on our currency, “In God we trust.”

You and I are also being affected by it, even if we do not condone those sinful actions. We readily accept lame excuses for not living as God's holy children in this world by condoning those who live together outside of marriage or watching those sins be glorified on TV. Our thoughts and attitudes are turning toward the pleasures of this world more and more, even keeping God's offerings for ourselves. When we do go to worship, we almost boast like the Israelites about how religious we are compared to many others.

Even though He does not stop us from sinning, He does speak to us to try to call us to repentance. And He speaks to us in a very vivid language. Listen to the Lord: **“I gave you empty stomachs in every city and lack of bread in every town, yet you have not returned to me, declares the Lord. I also**

withheld rain from you when the harvest was still three months away. I sent rain on one town, but withheld it from another. One field had rain; another had none and dried up. People staggered from town to town for water but did not get enough to drink, yet you have not returned to me, declares the Lord.” (v6-8) While we might be inclined to call these things natural occurrences, it is really the Lord speaking to us, reminding us that we are not the ones who are in control, even if we think we are. When God allows one portion of the country to be hit hard by the coronavirus, while others are spared, it gives us an opportunity to remind ourselves that we are nothing but puny beings who must rely upon the gracious good will of a being who is much greater than we are. Then we will also remember that we are accountable to Him for everything that we do in this life. And that will remind us that we are nothing but miserable sinners in His sight. It is that thought which leads us to repentance and the forgiveness of sins which He offers so freely to each one of us.

When the Lord speaks, He does speak in a vivid language which we can all understand. We have experienced the pandemic, forest fires, severe storms, social unrest, and so on. Have these things reminded us that we are not in control, but must humbly seek all of our blessings from the hand of our loving Savior?

The pandemic may have caused some people to do some thinking. But instead of returning to God and asking for His blessings, they are trying to come up with ways of handling the disease and its results on our own, as though we are in control. Others have taken on the doomsday approach and proclaimed that all of this is the natural result of disease. Still others wring their hands in helplessness, just wondering when things will again be back to normal so that life can continue without all of these worries.

They have heard God’s very vivid message. But that does not mean that they have reacted to this message in the way in which God wanted them to. Instead of looking to ourselves for solutions, God wants us to realize that we are not in control, and then to turn to Him. That is why He kept repeating, **“I have done this, yet you have not returned to me.”** It is hard to imagine that anyone could hear God’s message, and not return to Him. Yet that is what our nation is doing. Instead of recognizing the ways in which we have turned away from God, it seems as if we are still trying to cope with all of these disasters on our own.

But as Christians, we know better. We know that God is speaking to our nation, and calling her to repentance — calling to her to return to doing things the way that He wants them to be done — returning to calling a sin a sin, instead of speaking of it as an alternate life style. The pandemic we are experiencing reminds us believers that we are sinners who live in a sinful world. Our God is in control of all things, and expects us to live as His children in this world. So, as we see this spread of this disease, we confess our sinfulness, and flee to God’s infinite mercy. We need the forgiveness which only He can supply us.

So there is a good thing which can come from this. It may even be the purpose for which we are experiencing this disease. God will not stop our nation from continuing in its sins, but He will be calling to it to try to bring it to repentance. It is now up to us to listen to His call to repentance. As citizens in this country, we who are children of God and recognize God’s voice, are meant to be the seasoning in our nation. We dare not be silent. This year also happens to be an election year. That provides us with an excellent opportunity to let our voice be heard. There are candidates who openly profess that they will not be in favor of doing God’s will. We can let our voice be heard by not voting for them. There may be referendums on the ballot where we again can let our voice, reflecting God’s voice, be heard. Even though our most important citizenship is in heaven, we are also citizens of our nation on earth. Let us use our rights and privileges as citizens to proclaim God’s message to our nation. Because if we do not bring about a change to repentance from our nation, the Lord may bring His judgments on us.

We do live in a great nation, and we are to thank God for all of the blessings which He has given to us through this nation. So, as we celebrate the fourth of July. But let us also remember that in order to remain great, we, and our nation, need to listen to our Lord’s call to repentance.