

Bermudian Church of the Brethren

WEDNESDAY'S WORD – a midweek thought from Pastor Larry M. Dentler
to share a word of inspiration ... encouragement ... challenge ... a smile ... in the middle of your week
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Here I Stand

(Pastor Larry has been very reluctant to enter into the debate that rages over the National Football League players who refuse to stand for the playing of the National Anthem. I have good friends, dear friends, on all sides of this issue, and I don't desire to enter into an argument. But last Friday night as I attended the first Friday night football game of our Bermudian Springs Eagles, with one grandson, 8 month old Jaxsen, in arms, and another grandson, Mason, in Texas for Air Force basic training, I became deeply emotional as the Anthem was played. So I decided I wanted to share my feelings. I don't expect that everyone who reads this will agree with me completely. That's perfectly OK! I respect your opinion as I hope you will respect mine. Hear me! I will not enter into a back-and-forth argument about this! If you disagree and feel the need to respond, a simple "respectfully disagree" will be received with my love, understanding and respect. And of course, should anyone desire to share in a face-to-face discussion on the matter, I would welcome that. Here I stand.....)

The weather was perfect for Friday night football under the lights! My Bermudian Springs Eagles came on to the field in red over red – red shirts & red pants (*or should we be completely accurate in saying "cherry over cherry?"*). Bermudian Springs' colors are NOT red & gray!!! They are "cherry & steel." (*Pet peeve!*) (*But then why does the alma mater use the wrong colors in its lyrics?*) (*Pet peeve!*) My heart raced. Since my son John played for Bermudian I've been a BIG fan. There's something wonderful, pure and simple about Friday night high school football. The boys lined up, helmets under their arms and faced the American flag waving in the soft evening breeze, and a group of Bermudian singers shared the National Anthem. I was holding 8 month old Jaxsen. My hand was on my heart. Unexpectedly, my eyes began to fill with tears. With my youngest grandson in arms for his first football game, my thoughts raced to my oldest grandson Mason, more than a thousand miles away in Texas for Air Force basic training.

As you all know so well there has been a great debate over National Football League players who refuse to stand for the National Anthem before NFL games. I know some die hard football fans who refuse to watch NFL games now. And I know some who have strongly supported the right of those players to protest what they believe to be wrong with our country. I'm a "non-resistant." (*I don't use the word "pacifist" even though many Brethren do, because I believe it is a secular word with political connotations and that "non-resistant" is the more Biblical word and better describes our Brethren/Anabaptist position.*) I was a conscientious objector during the Viet Nam war. I personally believe it is inconsistent for me as a follower of Christ to serve in the military. But one of my heroes, and the finest and most Christ like of any Brethren minister I've had the privilege to know in all my days, Brother Glenn Julius, served in the military in a noncombatant role in World War II and was in England on D-Day as the planes flew out! Glenn made that decision out of conscience. In the face of the evil in Europe, he believed the Christian thing ... the Brethren thing ... to do was to stand against the evil. I've come to handle with respect the conscience of each person who needs to make that decision. In our Bermudian congregation we have many men who proudly served as 1W alternative service workers (*conscientious objectors*), and many men who proudly served in many different

branches of the military and several who saw combat. We love them all! We respect them all! We honor the consciences of all!

And you know what? The American flag, and the National Anthem, **for me**, stands for a country, with all its imperfections to be sure, who has made allowance for those decisions of conscience! And now I have a son, John, who serves as a firefighter, putting his life on the line for others, who wears that flag on his shoulder, and a grandson, Mason, preparing to serve the nation from his own decision of conscience. I'll stand!

The Bible, as it so often does, paints a broad picture for us. There is a clear Biblical teaching that when we choose to become a follower of Jesus Christ, in a very real way we give up our earthly allegiances. And so as a Christ follower we are NOT first & foremost American citizens. We are citizens of the Kingdom of God ... and Christ is our King! This is hard for a lot of American Christians to grasp. But it is what the Bible teaches. We are truly "migrants" or "resident aliens." Our American citizenship **MUST ALWAYS** be secondary to our Kingdom citizenship!

"My divinely loved friends, since you are resident aliens and foreigners in this world, I appeal to you to divorce yourselves from the evil desires that wage war within you. Live honorable lives as you mix with unbelievers, even though they accuse you of being evildoers. For they will see your beautiful works and have a reason to glorify God in the day He visits us."

1 Peter 2:11-12 TPT

But then the Bible teaches that we are to be excellent citizens of the authority we live under. We are to live respectfully of the authority over us. We are to pray for leaders with the understanding that if they are in power then God has allowed that. The Bible only gives us two exceptions for when we may be disobedient of our government. If the government asks us to do something that the Bible forbids, or, if the government forbids us from doing something that the Bible demands, then ***"We must obey God rather than man."*** (Acts 5:29) Other than that Christians are to live as exemplary citizens with the hope that their conduct will point others to Christ. Don't like the government? The Bible gives no exclusion for you to be disrespectful! Dislike the laws? The Bible gives no exclusion for you to be disobedient!

"Obey the government, for God is the one who has put it there. There is no government anywhere that God has not placed in power. So those who refuse to obey the laws of the land are refusing to obey God, and punishment will follow."

Romans 13:1-2 LB

For we in the Brethren family, living between these two has sometimes been a struggle. Our earliest faith ancestors were persecuted so unjustly by the government that their inclination was to separate absolutely and completely from anything to do with the government. When they escaped the European persecution and found new life and freedom here in America, they were deeply appreciative of the government and freedom of conscience! When the American Revolution came along they refused to side with the Revolution, in obedience to the Bible, and often faced persecution again.

In 1914 Brethren minister, Martin G. Brumbaugh was elected as Governor of Pennsylvania. This signaled a new willingness for Brethren to be supportive of government. Our church leaders worked with the government to develop programs such as Brethren Volunteer Service so that during times of a draft Brethren could serve their nation in ways other than military ... "alternate service." In both World Wars I and II some Brethren chose alternate service approved by the government, some chose non-combatant military service, some chose regular military service.

I wish that these athletes, who are causing so much stress today, would understand that from their position of wealth and prestige, there could be a thousand better ways to speak about and try to help with issues they feel strongly about. Their "kneel downs" aren't helping anyone and do cause many to feel disrespected. Any one of them could call for a press conference and have a hundred eager reporters ready to hear them talk about the issue they want to share. I thank the Lord for our government ... far from perfect ... and our nation ... with many flaws ... for recognizing conscience! So when I stand with my hand on my heart for the singing of the National Anthem, I stand with thankfulness for a government that recognizes conscience! I stand in respect for the conscience decisions of my Brethren who have served (and serve) the nation in alternate service, for my Brethren who have served (and serve) in the military, for those like my son John who have served (and serve) as first responders, and for my grandson Mason in basic training for the Air Force.

Here I stand. Pastor Larry <><