

Liberation from hypocrisy

By David Lowry (<https://www.livinglutheran.org/author/david-lowry/>) | October 14, 2020



I was once a guest preacher at a congregation celebrating Veterans Day during Sunday worship. The service began with a color guard carrying an American flag into the sanctuary—a new and jarring experience for me. It was as if space given for worship of the one God was being shared with a second god—a cross represented one, a flag the other.

Many American Christians have long tended to merge national values with Christian ones. We have blended national notions of freedom with the freedom offered in Christ. National interests, rather than the reign of God, have driven many of our decisions.

It's hard to imagine early Christians celebrating the Roman Empire in their gatherings centered in Christ. If we claim our nation is completely different from that cultural context, we overlook, among other things, the genocide of Native Americans in its initial formation and the lawmaking and practices that established and maintained slavery, Jim Crow and other racial disparities and injustices.

Adapting nationalism to Christianity robs us of Christ. We are left with a Christian facade, a hypocrisy that provides little or no witness to God's purposes. All hypocrisies destroy our witness; nationalist Christianity is simply one among many. We all have them. The good news is that, in Christ, God liberates us from our hypocrisies, and we are invited to participate in God's work.

Jesus calls us into a life of daily surrender to God's will—a life of prayer and the action that flows from prayer.

Into a world not so different from ours, Jesus came proclaiming the nearness of God's reign and called us to turn to God and to God's ways of governing. He described God's reign and the way into it. He let us know that, with God, the humble are exalted and the servant is leader; that blessing is found in our poverty and need for God and in doing God's will, loving mercy, doing justice and being peacemakers.

When Jesus (<https://www.livinglutheran.org/tag/jesus/>) proclaimed, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near" (Matthew 3:2), he was calling us, in Paul's words, to "[turn] to God from idols, to serve a living and true God" (1 Thessalonians 1:9). Jesus calls us from whatever has displaced God from the center of our lives. He invites us into a journey of relinquishing our lives to the loving God. In this way, we are stripped of hypocrisies and freed to see the needs of others and respond with compassion.

Here, then, are some ways to move forward to liberation from hypocrisy:

1. Spend time with Jesus' teaching.

Meditate on the Beatitudes (<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+5&version=NRSV>) and the Sermon on the Mount (<https://www.livinglutheran.org/2019/02/angers-danger/>). Be aware of what attracts you to Jesus' teaching and what offends you and why. Ask yourself the following questions: What allegiances does Jesus call you to turn from to follow him? How do you respond to Jesus' call to love your enemies and pray for them? How will you be a witness to this enemy-love when your nation calls for war? Are you willing to be changed by Jesus' teaching?

2. Attend to the inner life.

Jesus calls us to be mindful of what's going on inside us. He tells us that out of the heart come all kinds of evil. He also says that "out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water" (John 7:38). Let the Spirit of truth help you to be honest about motivations, attitudes, prejudices and commitments that sidetrack you from doing God's will. Learn to recognize the living water in your life and flow with it. Be led by the Spirit.

3. Count the cost.

We have found many ways to make Jesus fit with our allegiances to political ideologies, worldviews, lifestyles and prejudices. When we do so, we end up with a Jesus of our own making, one that would accommodate our idols rather than unmask them. The Jesus whom God sent speaks to us in words similar to those directed to fishermen: “Follow me, and I will make you fish for people” (Matthew 4:19). Their response must be ours: They left everything and followed him.

4. Actively follow.

Jesus does not call us to a set of beliefs but to action that comes from the re-centering of our lives in God. Jesus calls us to lose our lives, deny ourselves, take up our suffering and death, and follow. He calls us into a life of daily surrender to God’s will—a life of prayer and the action that flows from prayer. We are invited into life in the Spirit who creates community. The Spirit gives us discernment for the next steps love takes. As the act of following Jesus strips us of our hypocrisies, we become salt and light in the world.



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