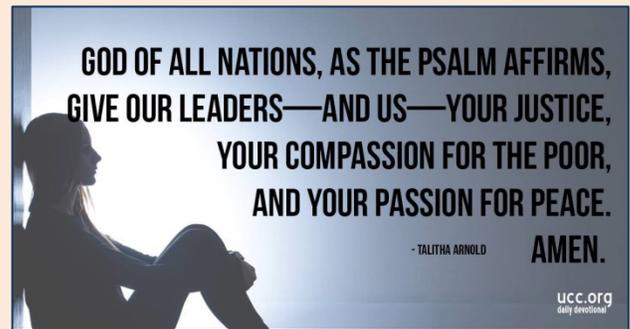


FIRST AND CENTER
Pastor's Blog
September 27, 2017

Proposition: that in this country the “flag” and “national anthem” have become idols.



Proposition: that in this country professional sports played by men, and especially football, have become idols.

Evidence? In a week when we are on the brink of war with North Korea; when many people in Texas, Florida, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and especially Puerto Rico, are in the midst of life-threatening disasters of epic proportions; when we are still at war in Afghanistan (remember that?); when racial injustice on many levels is rampant in our country as is the rise of white nationalism and supremacism; when all this and so much more needs serious attention, the President of the US and the media are obsessed with professional athletes kneeling, instead of standing, for the playing of the national anthem before games.

Question: why is it that we play the national anthem and salute the flag before sporting events? What does the one have to do with the other? Sporting events are not government activities like public schools or town meetings or military events. Sporting events are entertainment; do we each in our own homes stand to play the national anthem before we put on the TV in the evening? Or do we do this at the beginning of rock concerts or county fairs or the start of a movie at the movie theater? Not usually. So, why sporting events?

I do not pretend to understand this or be able to explain it. What I do know is that the kneeling is not about the flag or the anthem or the sacrifices of the military or even about football. The kneeling is to call attention to the reality of our great continuing national sin and struggle: racism. And the way to keep from really dealing with that is to distract attention by questioning the patriotism of players and owners, as though you have to be proven a patriot to play football.

Enough of making the flag and the anthem more important than truth and justice.

Enough of making football more important than human suffering and imminent war. Let us search harder for truth and justice, in a, perhaps vain, hope that we will recover a deeper meaning of the American Way.

~ Rev. Shelly Stackhouse,
Pastor