A father was talking with his rather rebellious son one day & said, "Every person who lives in the United States is a privileged person." The boy angrily shot back, "I disagree." "And that is your privilege." the father replied.

We have the privilege to disagree. We have the privilege to speak our mind. We have freedom of religion, of speech, of the press, the right of petition, and to bear arms. We have the freedom to hope & pursue our dreams. In America, we are free in so many ways that most other people in the world are not!

We have these rights because – from the Revolutionary War Afghanistan –our forefathers and mothers, our brothers and sisters, our sons and daughters have been willing to fight and even to die if need be to insure that these freedoms continue. To lift a wise saying from our own church newsletter, we live in the land of the free, because of the brave.

We need to remember and honor their sacrifices in our behalf both in gratitude for the lives we are currently living but also, should that day come again – which in many ways it already has – we too might have the courage to take a stand for our liberties and yes if need be to fight and die so that future generations of Americans can enjoy the same freedoms we now have.

Last week the nation celebrated Memorial Day, honoring all those who through the years have paid the ultimate price for our freedoms. This coming week we as a town will remember the 75th anniversary of D-Day because of the steep price in lives that our families in this particular county paid on that fateful day in World War 2.

(Quoting Jim Morrison) From a population of 30,000, some 4,000 men and women served in the military during the war. Some 50 fought in the Normandy Invasion. Twenty Bedford men were killed in action on D-Day (the first day of the invasion) -- nineteen of them in the 116th Infantry's Company A, which had been our National Guard unit in Bedford. This county is believed to have lost more men per capita on D-Day than any other community in America.
But, as tragic as D-Day was for Bedford, its sacrifice throughout the entirety of the war was far greater. Bedford men fought and died on the ground, in the air, and at sea in all major theaters. Over 140 were killed or died, many more were wounded and over 20 spent time in POW camps.

In February of 1945, in the midst of that war, on a beach in the Pacific Ocean, Joe Rosenthal pulled out his camera and clicked a photo that would later become the most reproduced image in the history of photography:

Six Marines planting the American flag on the island of Iwo Jima. The photo of these young men raising the flag was splashed across the front page of every paper in the country, and for months papers republished the photo. Newspapers were saved, posters were purchased, the photo appeared everywhere and in every American history published since. people could not get enough of this photo. In today’s language, it went viral. What was so special about this image?

What that photo showed was the determination, the grit, the patriotism, the sacrifice willingly paid by those who had gone to war. They were there because we as a country had deemed that there were things worth fighting for.

They were fighting against tyranny and injustice with Germany and they were defending us against Japan. They were fighting for all the freedoms we enjoy here today.

- The freedom of speech that we enjoy even when we may not agree with what someone else has to say.
- The freedom of assembly that we are practicing right here right now.
- The freedom from religious persecution that our founders so clearly wrote into our Constitution.
- The freedom of security from terrorism both by foreign or local powers.

You see, these United States of America, have long stood for those privileges that have often been and continue to be forcefully denied others around our globe. As a nation, with all our internal struggles and political squabbles, we still stand as champion for freedom and the removal of tyranny. We still stand for hope for a better life as an individual and as families living in a free tolerant land.

Why do you think that so many people want to come here? Even risking their lives in leaky boats on the ocean or in month’s long marches through bandit infested jungles just to live here, whether legal or illegal, to be part of this country? It is because of their hope for a better life that our country has long promised for those who came.
Our open armed welcome of immigrants which has up until now defined us as a nation, once inspired France to gift us with a 302’ tall monument to freedom, who in the New York Harbor still lifts her torch high, lighting the way for all who would come to our shores.

Think about this, except for the native Americans who were here when our forebears landed, every single one of us is a child of immigrants. Being American is not like being ethnic German, or French, Italian, Black, or Hispanic. We are a mixed people from every nation, every religion, who have chosen -- in one of the greatest governmental experiments in human history – to live together in a peaceful self-governing, tolerant society. An experiment after 200 years which is once again in danger of failure because a spirit of intolerance, prejudice, terrorism, a refusal to compromise for the sake of our neighbor, has once again crept into our midst, and it threatens the very foundations of the society we so highly value. Next time you hear a new piece on the thousands stranded at our borders trying to get in to become citizens, think about your own immigrant parents and what it meant for them to fight to come to this country.

That is why we remember and we honor our men and women who have fought and died for the lives we now live, because of the American dream, these are things are still worth fighting and if need be dying for.

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While some religious people may challenge whether any war for any reason is ever justified, our scripture this morning clearly describes some of those things that worth fighting for: for God ordained causes, and for your family’s safety.

The story behind this Nehemiah text is that after 70+ years of exile, a change of governments had allowed the descendants of those Hebrews captured and enslaved in the previous Babylonian war to return to their former homeland. But in a striking parallel to the founding of modern Israel in 1948, when they got back to their land, those people who had moved into the territory since their departure both resented and physically resisted these Jews in their attempts to return home. All the walls of Jerusalem having been destroyed in the previous war, the new arrivals lived in constant peril of being attacked by the locals around them. Nehemiah was both a fellow Jew and a high government official in the ruling Medo/Persian govt. – he was the cup bearer for the king. Finding out that his newly returned home relatives were being harassed and attacked. He received permission and funds to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. But Jerusalem was a long way away from the capital, so arriving on the scene Nehemiah quickly learned that if they were going to survive they would need to defend themselves.

Nehemiah writes, I stood up and said to the nobles and the officials and the rest of the people,

Do not be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your kin, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your homes.

Nehemiah 4:14
Nehemiah told the people that there were things worth fighting for.

**The first thing he said was:** Remember the Lord, fight for the Lord. They now lived in a pagan culture that wanted nothing to do with their God, their Temple, or their city. Not only their lives but their faith was under attack.

Nehemiah told them that they must remember who and what they are fighting for. Remember the Lord He said. He is what we fight for. Our very existence as God’s people.

Friends, God and our faith is still worth fighting for today. We as a people of God, Christians are under attack around the world and here at home.

Look at verse 12 again: the Jews who lived near them said ‘**From all the places where they live they will come up against us.**’

The same thing is going on in our world today. We, God’s people are under attack from all directions. Whether it’s the bombing of Churches in Sri Lanka, the arrests of Christian pastors in China, to local laws now penalizing Christian convictions in the marketplace, to the not-so-subtle demands that Christians keep their faith opinions private, away the public square.

Our nation was founded on the concept of freedom of religion and the free expression of religion in the public square. Now it seems many of our leaders would change that concept to a **freedom from religion**. Even though George Washington had long ago pointed out that "**it is impossible to rightly govern a nation without God and the Bible.**" Our great American experiment founded on the Christian faith and Christian principles.

But now in America, Christians with Biblical convictions are seen as the pariahs not as patriots; for having standards that are unchanging compared to the ever changing standards of our religiously unmoored culture, we are viewed as out dated, narrow minded, “haters.”

This week I was listening to a Danish theologian point blank declare that western culture is dying because it has turned a blind eye to the fact that most of what it considers socio-economic problems from immigration, to education, to terrorist attacks are actually spiritually based problems.

Also, **that Western culture’s double standard, tolerating any other religious expression while being reflexively antagonistic to anything Christian is a direct result of demonic activity in our world.**

I completely agree with her on both of these points:

- that most socio-economic problems have a spiritual dimension/solution which is being completely ignored by those making the laws. As long as we ignore the spiritual dimension of these problems we will fail to find a solution to them.
- that western culture’s unique antagonism to Christianity has been demonically designed and continuously fueled.

Now before you think I have joined the radical right wing crazies, realize that this is exactly – and still is – the problems and the enemy whom the Apostle Paul warned Christians to stand against 2,000 years ago.

Our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

Ephesians 6:12

Realize the most of the recent wars, persecutions, all of the recent terror attacks have been driven by religious convictions. Buildings full of people are being blown up just because they are Christian, Jewish, Muslim gathering places. Christians are being beheaded just because they are Christians. Christian leaders are being arrested by their governments and disappearing from view. Families are being pulled out of their homes, the parents raped and killed, the children carried away to be child soldiers or sex slaves just because they are Christians. I know that some of these people and events are happening in other countries but if our society allows this to continue, it will eventually come to our shores.

**Christians, we must fight for our faith**, for those things we value. Because what we fail to value and to fight will most likely be lost for our children.

According to Pew Research reports, Americans listing their faith as “NONE” grew dramatically from 16% in 2007 to 23% in 2015. 35% of young millennials Now identify themselves as non-religious. During this same time period, those describing themselves as “Christian” have fallen from 78% to 71%.

Friends we are losing the battle for our faith. That’s 7% drop in eight years. If this same trend continues, in less than 70 years, the Christian faith in the United States of America as we know it today could be wiped out. I know there are theological understandings of why this won’t happen but we must be aware that Christianity is under attack and we are losing.
For times such as these, Paul warned us to put on the whole armor of God. Just as our youth group showed us last week, only with such spiritual equipage will we be able both to discern and then stand against the attacks of the devil: characteristics such as truthfulness, righteousness, a readiness to proclaim the gospel of peace, faith, the message of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. Ephesians 6:14-17

That Danish theologian, rhetorically asked “what has happened to the church?” which she then answered, they have just disappeared leaving a spiritual vacuum for other religions to fill. All People have a religious dimension and they are searching for something to satisfy their spiritual hunger. If they can’t find it in Christianity, they will find it in another religion that is less tolerant, less peaceful, less willing to extend mutual respect.

We the church must get out of our complacency and once again FIGHT for God. Nehemiah told the people to “Remember The Lord,” fight for what you believe in. Nehemiah also told them fight for your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your homes!”

not only must Christians fight for God, we must also fight for our families. Friends our families are at great risk and we need to fight for them. Today, like never before in America, the family is under assault in our country.

The natural order, the design for family that God established in Genesis is being redefined in this country.

Christian theologian and family expert Dr James Dobson states “The family was divinely instituted and sanctioned in the beginning, when God created one man and one woman, brought them together, and commanded them to "be fruitful and multiply." This is where we begin, and this is where we must stand.”

The battle is in our homes when we allow society to teach our children that sex before marriage is normal ... and we say nothing to the contrary. That getting pregnant in high school is no big deal. Remember when people were ashamed of this? Not any more. We have lost that battle. Remember when abortion was a dirty word? Not anymore. Now it is an acceptable form of birth control. The latest statistic from 2014 is that 19% of all pregnancies in the U.S. are now ended by elective abortion. Yes, there are legitimate concerns for which abortion is appropriate and should remain legal: for incest, rape, health of the baby, or health of the mother, but all these reasons make up less than 8% of all abortions, while over 86% of abortions are done merely as a matter of self-convenience: had a fling and got pregnant, not married, don’t want to have a child,
can’t afford to raise a child. The Psalmist declared that Israel was driven by God from their land because they polluted the ground with the blood of their innocent children whom they had sacrificed to idols. Are we not also guilty of this same sin (Psalm 106:37-39).

Just this February Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, D. New York, questioned - because of humanity’s continuing environmental impact whether it was even moral to bring more children into the world. Children are no longer considered a blessing from God, but an encumbrance to one’s personal lifestyle and a hazard to our future.

At a dramatically increasing rate since 1971, America’s birth rate is dropping way below its population replacement rate. If not for immigration in a very few years, the job market will have a hard time finding enough workers. We already have a desperate shortage skilled trades people willing to work. Next time you drive past a construction site, look at the workers, the shinglers, the lawnmowers – these are the people willing to meet America’s needs.

Remember when the family was defined as a husband and a wife and children? Not anymore. We have two parent households where both are male or female. While less than 4.5% of all adults identify as LGBT (.6% as transgender), have you noticed that LGBT portrayals make up a much larger percentage of appearances in commercials and t.v. shows? This is intentional, culture wants you to see this as perfectly normal, perfectly wholesome, just a new way to do family. But this is in direct contradiction to what God’s intention was for the family.

So, we must fight for not only our families but also for the very definition of a family. 23% of all children now live in single parent homes because their parents’ marriage have either broken up or they never bothered to get married in the first place.

Married folks, You must fight for your marriage. You must fight for your families. If you want your children to grow up as Christians as respectable citizens, they will need you there to train them and to lead the way. Marriage is not easy, there are major issues that couples must be willing to work through – to keep the marriage strong. We cannot just throw up our hands and quit. We must fight for our marriages and our families for our children’s sake if for no other reason. Society will tell you that it’s ok to just walk away. It is not.

Fight for your faith, fight for your families Nehemiah told the Jewish people. Fight for your faith, fight for your families, is what our Bible still tells us today.

As Americans, as Christians, we have many other things worth fighting for. Think about that this week as we honor those in uniform who fought and died for our cause; for God, for our country, for our freedoms, and our family’s safety. Because those
privileges, those freedoms, that we are unwilling to fight for, will soon be lost to our children.

Also remember the countless number of civilians who gave their lives fighting in their own homelands for the precious freedoms they cherished. People like Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a German theologian and pastor who against the urgings of his friends left the U.S. to return to Germany during the war years intentionally to speak out and to fight against Hitler’s regime. He was arrested by the Gestapo and spent 1 ½ years in prison before they purposely executed him just before the end of the war – lest he get to go free. Bonhoeffer said:

'Silence in the face of evil is itself evil:
God will not hold us guiltless.
Not to speak is to speak.
Not to act is to act.'
D. Bonhoeffer

Let’s pray about this.....