

## ULC Sermon Study Resource

### *Idols — Nationalism*

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**Prayer:** Pause for a few moments to go to the Lord in prayer. Ask that He would draw near to you in this time, and open your heart and mind to hear His Word.

**Icebreaker:** What's your opinion of March Madness?

**Reading:** Acts 10:24-48

#### **Outline:**

- I. The Problem of Nationalism (v. 24-33)
  - a. Nationalism is when a nation or national identity becomes more important to a person than God or the Kingdom of God.
  - b. When Peter tells Cornelius it is "against our law" for a Jew to associate with or visit a Gentile, he means it's against Jewish societal norms, not against divinely ordered law.  
**Q: Why does God need to intervene for Peter to welcome Cornelius as a brother?**
- II. The Pervasiveness of Nationalism (Acts 11: 2-3)
  - a. The pervasiveness of nationalism in the church leads to division and strife.
  - b. Nationalism was a problem in Old Testament Israel and the early church, but it has been especially pronounced and pervasive in the Western and American church.  
**Q: Why do you think the "circumcision party's" first reaction is outrage, not joy?**
- III. The Unity of the Spirit in Baptism (v. 34-48)
  - a. Baptism is where God applies the promises of his grace and forgiveness to us, literally washes away our sins, and unites us to Christ in forgiveness, new life, and new identity.
  - b. Through the waters of baptism and the work of the Holy Spirit, we have a unity and oneness in our identity as children of God that supersedes loyalty to our country of origin.  
**Q: How does the Holy Spirit quench nationalism's flame and bring about unity?**

#### **Reflection/Application Questions:**

- 1) Why is nationalism an idol that's easy to call out in others but hard to see in yourself?
- 2) Why is the dream of making America a Christian nation so alluring?
- 3) How do both left and right fall into the trap of prioritizing cultural norms over scriptural ethics?
- 4) How do we confront the problem of nationalism in ourselves, our churches, and our communities?
- 5) Can you think of a time where you've seen unity in Christ bridge vast differences?

#### **Suggestions for further study:**

- John 4:1-45 **Q: How does Jesus defy the norm of nationalism with this Samaritan woman?**
- Gal. 2:11-14 **Q: How does accommodating nationalism lead Peter into hypocrisy?**
- Rev. 7:9-12 **Q: How is all nationalism stripped away before worship at the throne of God?**

**Closing Prayer:** "Lord Jesus, we thank you that you have called us to be your own through the waters of Holy Baptism. Thank you for pouring out your grace for us on the cross and in the empty tomb. Thank you for forgiving us, loving us, and giving us a new identity that unites us to brothers and sisters of all nations and of all places. Jesus, teach us not to confuse being an American with being a Christian. Teach us not to confuse America with the kingdom of God, but to keep your kingdom first and always remember our identity in you. May you be first and foremost in our lives. We pray this in your Holy Name, Amen."