

Colin Kapernick, I'm not a fan. I don't really like the 49ers, and for two years in row, Kapernick destroyed the Packers. Since then, I am a bit bitter. But that is the only reason.

Most of you probably have heard about his not standing for the national anthem and the outcry that has followed.

For two weeks this topic has been stirring. And a lot of it has made me sick. My stomach churns and heart races as I read, and pray, and think, and try to piece it together.

But I'm not angry that he sat down or now takes a knee, or that he used his platform to draw attention to an issue – even though it has raised debates over added issues. What I am outraged at more is the hate directed at him for a peaceful protest.

What upsets me more is blind patriotism that is more concerned with the song and flag of our country, than with the people. What is hard to comprehend is that our military personnel, their work and sacrifice is put on a pedestal, treated as superior to that of “regular” citizens.

We can still honor and respect military and its veteran, police, fire, EMT, and other first responders, and at the

same time admit – by protest or other ways – that our nation is not the greatest.

We can remember those who courageously died on Sept 11, and admit our sinful acts of hate against Muslims that have exploded since that day – in the name of patriotism. We can admit that who we hope to be as creations of God - people of love, forgiveness, equity and peace – is failing.

Failing - because we continue to act out of our sin – namely our sin of worshipping idols – instead of worshipping God.

When God created humus beings – from the dirt of the earth – they turned against God, following their own will, wanting to be God. Wanting to be worshipped and adored for all their knowledge. And when God exposed their sin, they tried to run and hide from God – scared and embarrassed. They tried to trust in everything – except the creator.

Do we admit that sin, be exposed for our mistakes, forgive and be forgiven?

Or do we hide?

Our nation (and its people) have a hard time admitting mistakes. Have a hard time admitting that we are far from perfect. We want to be the best, strongest, infallible. And when our division and sin is exposed we hide – behind patriotism. Using an anthem, a flag - to justify our hate and bigotry. When someone points out the injustice and inequality facing people each and every day, we feel the need to defend, trust, our country above all else.

The Colin Kaepernick debate has affirmed our worship – of the flag, anthem, country, military – above our worship of God. We show more fight for our country, than we do for our Church.

We care more about what our commander in chief says – than what Jesus says. We rather sing patriotic songs – than hymns of praise. We talk about lives put on the line for the flag...neglecting the life of Christ that was put on the line for all of humanity.

We want to mix patriotism and faith. Faith should shape any patriotism, not the other way around. When faith directs our actions – we may actually see ‘a nation indivisible, with liberty and justice for all’. When faith forms our life – we will see “truths that all are created equal, with certain unalienable Rights, Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”

But our worship of country, so often has made God second place – a tack on to our idols of worship. Like the Pledge of Allegiance – the flag and nation first (‘under God’ a subtle addition).

Rachel Held Evans in a post reminded others - Do you know how outraged the early church would be to know that we are fighting over allegiance to the empire, before any allegiance to God?

God never intended the United States to be some superior

Christian nation.

That isn't who we are.

We are creations of God. Being people of a country should not be what defines us.

We are not first American, or Veteran or Lutheran.

When will – 'I am God's creation' – become our defining public marker?

We have freedom – not because of our military action and wars won. We are not free because of our Constitution or Declaration of Independence. Our lives are not about flags of freedom. We are free because of Christ. That is our center and where our identity lies. We pledge allegiance to God – nothing more. We acknowledge our citizenship, not in a nation, but in Christ, in heaven – as Paul proclaims in Philippians.

We trust in our identity as God's child, over trust in a country that is not living up to its standards.

We say we are made in the image of God – but we have created the flag to represent an image we made up, which doesn't look much like God. We have attributed a certain meaning to the flag – what it represents, and how we should act and feel about it. That is how worship and priorities are misplaced.

We are fighting over the wrong thing. Instead of putting words in Kaepernick's mouth, instead of attributing his act as dishonor, instead of shaming him, we should be ashamed of our sin in this world, or as written by Kareem Abdul Jabaar: Our Failure to fix this problem [of race] is what's really un-American.

From our rampant denial of racism to attacking Natives in North Dakota fighting to preserve their holy burial places, from a pipeline – as people of God we have more important issues for which to fight than who stands up for the national anthem.

Most of us probably didn't stand each time it was played during the Olympics, nor put our hands on our hearts. I didn't. And I won't say the pledge, wear or wave flags.

And if you think think this is not political, you miss the point. This is a faith issue affecting our relationship with God and others, how we love God and our neighbor.

The first humans wanted to be above God. We act in the same ways.

Which is why we need God. God's breath of life breathed into us.

God's ability to find us – when we hide behind flags, anthems and patriotism, and trust in country more than God.

We need God's love and forgiveness poured out on us through the life and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Confidence and freedom in God –

to name our sin,

confess our mistakes,

and forgive as we have been forgiven.

Because that is who God created us to be.

