

## *Stop the War*

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Ancient Witness: Luke 19:41-42

*As Jesus approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it and said, "If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes."*

It usually takes me about 10 to 15 hours to develop and write a sermon. But sometimes I need to chuck them, like this morning, and speak about an urgent concern.

Well, Happy New Year! It's the first week of 2020, and I'm already exhausted!

And I can tell—I suspect this is true of others—we'll need to take care of ourselves, to pay attention to what is going on inside us, to attend to our interior life and our inner spiritual well-being. Because as crucial as all of these external things are—and they are very, very important—we cannot lose sight of what is precious under our own noses. 2020 is going to be a marathon. In the immortal words of Bette Davis: "Fasten your seat belts. It's going to be a bumpy night."

Amid the ongoing impeachment process of our President for alleged acts of corruption, this week there was the spectacle of a political rally of "Evangelicals for Trump" at a mega church in Florida. This is unprecedented. According to the Johnson Amendment, churches are forbidden from endorsing political candidates or parties. If they do; they lose their tax-exempt status. When asked, the church said it was merely renting their space and took no position. But what was disturbing to me was the anointing of Donald Trump by these leaders, saying that he was "chosen by God" and making allegiance to him an article of faith for American evangelicals.

You might know that this rally was a swift response to criticism of the President by the evangelical publication that was founded by Billy Graham, *Christianity Today*. The editor and the president of the magazine supported the impeachment process and the removal of Trump from office. And so what we're witnessing is the take over of the evangelical churches, a suppression of dissent and a merging of a political party and ideology with religion, with conservative Christianity. It is reminiscent of the German Christians that merged with fascism in the 1930's and 40's.

And then, before the confetti was cleaned up from New Year's eve, the President ordered an assassination of General Suleimani of Iran via a drone attack while he was at the airport in Baghdad, Iraq. Such an act, it seems to me, violates both our constitution and international law, and is a reckless act of war.

The explanation is that Suleimani is a "bad guy," an "evil doer," if you will. The administration claims that he is responsible for hundreds of American soldiers' deaths in Iraq. But no further evidence has been given. Before this execution, people didn't even know who Suleimani was. It has been suggested that he gave Shiite militias aid and bombs, but this is something that the United States has been doing

for years, including helping Sadaam Hussein use chemical weapons, killing thousands of Iranians, including civilians and children.

Meanwhile, the New Year started this week with the entire continent of Australia on fire. The catastrophic effects of global warming are upon us, and our leaders are unwilling to take any meaningful action.

One question in my mind is, “Why now?” Apparently, Suleimani was been a “bad guy” for years. But he also recently was instrumental in defeating ISIS in Iraq. Why now? The administration offers no further evidence. The President claims he did it to “stop a war.” But in our country, presidents cannot act unilaterally in these matters. Such an act needs the consent of “we, the people” through congress. We cannot simply take his word on this. Such a drastic action is far more likely to start a war than prevent one.

More recently, the Administration invoked the Authorization to Use Military Force (AUMF). This was adopted 18 years ago and allows the President to skip congressional approval before using military force, even though, according to our Constitution, only the Congress has the power to declare war. The AUMF was designed to go after those responsible for the 9/11 attacks—stateless terrorist organizations—but the Administration is trying to exploit its broad language. The AUMF certainly does not include acts of war against another sovereign nation. And again, no evidence was given of such activity toward citizens of the U.S.

Perhaps this has more to do with siding with Saudi Arabia and defending their oil fields. After all, we have a history of disastrous wars over oil in the Middle East. Fabricated “weapons of mass destruction” led to over half a million people killed. Plus we have spent trillions of dollars and sacrificed the lives of our soldiers.

A war with Iran would be absolutely devastating from an economic, human and moral perspective. The burden and cost of this war would fall upon working people of the U.S. and the citizens of Iran. The wealthy decision-makers would be largely unaffected. And so, we deserve to know why. For we, the people, are ultimately accountable. We must claim our proper responsibility as citizens of this democratic republic.

As a person of faith, as a Christian, when it comes to the Just War Theory, a minimal standard, entering a war with Iran fails miserably on each of the criteria for a “just war.” Like the Vietnam and Iraq wars before it, it fails the ethical test. And in my view, we are obliged to oppose it. Yet it’s looking more and more like a war in search of a reason.

And until we receive not fabricated excuses, but indisputably clear and compelling reasons—a true justification—we must say, “no!”

No to provocations and escalations toward war.  
No to unconstitutional, authoritarian and reckless acts of war.  
No to war.

So I now invite you to join me right now in a moment of silent prayer, that we may look within ourselves and know the things that make for peace.