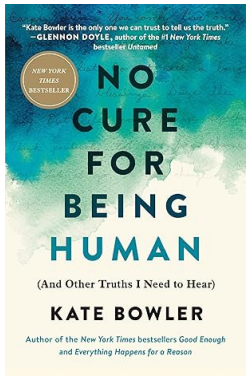
SERMON TAKE-HOME NOTES — September 7, 2025

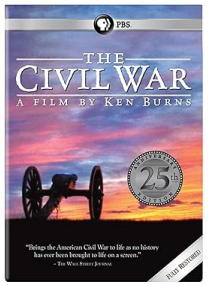


Introducing the Book Study for this Fall: Kate Bowler's *No Cure for Being Human (And Other Truths I Need to Hear)*. It's a story of faith in surviving cancer. In the first chapter, there's a surprising vignette that suggests there's also versions of faith that can be less helpful or even harmful (based on a book she had written about five years earlier, titled *Blessed: A History of the American Prosperity Gospel*). It is a book about having faith to stand up to challenges like a deadly diagnosis of cancer. Join us on Wednesdays for this Book Study! (Details in the today's bulletin.)

Introducing this morning's Gospel Reading: Count the cost of having the faith to stand up to the challenges of a deadly diagnosis of a rising Nationalism — in Jesus's case a Jewish nationalism trying to fight against Roman Nationalism, in our case the oxymoron of "Christian Nationalism." The heavy-handed, authoritarian, nationalistic way of ruling literally kills people. In standing up to it, to be a disciple of Jesus, will require one to metaphorically, and perhaps literally, carry one's own cross. Standing for God's reign coming into the world might get you crucified. That's the cost of discipleship to the One who is bringing that reign into world.

For God's reign, you see, stands for the American ideal of all people are created equal. I heard an interview this week with Ken Burns, the videographer who produces brilliant histories for PBS. He began with a series on the Civil War way back in 1990, from which he recalled a quote he had featured 35 years ago in the series on the Civil War. Abraham Lincoln was writing an acquaintance named Joshua Speed in 1855, fully five years before he ran for President. Lincoln wrote these prophetic words in his letter:

> Our progress in degeneracy appears to me to be pretty rapid. As a nation, we began by declaring that 'all men are created equal.' We now practically read it 'all men are created equal, except negroes.' When the Know-Nothings get control, it will read 'all men are created equal, except negroes, and foreigners, and catholics.' When it comes to this I should prefer emigrating to some country where they make no pretense of loving liberty — to Russia, for instance, where despotism can be taken pure, and without the base alloy of hypocrisy.



Wow! Isn't that prophetic for out time, too? I submit to you that our current leadership simply does not believe in our nation's credo that all people are created equal.

Another gem from Ken Burns in the interview I saw this week. He conjured up that holiday favorite movie *It's a Wonderful Life*, in which Jimmy Stewart's character, George Bailey, is driven to such despair that he tries to take his own life. Clarence the angel, gives George the chance to see how the world changes if he were not there working for good, especially against Bedford Falls greedy banker Mr. Potter. Clarence shows him how his resistance to Mr. Potter prevents Potter from taking over their town. In a world without George Bailey, Bedford Falls becomes the dystopian Pottersville. Ken Burns asks simply of our moment: Do we want to live in Bedford Falls, or in Pottersville? In other words, what will happen to our nation if we aren't among those who resist Christian Nationalism?

Yes, we should count the cost of discipleship to the coming of God's reign into the world through Jesus. But another way to calculate the cost is to ask: what is the cost to millions of others if we don't bold stand up and resist? In my current situation, I count the cost of not trying, with everything I have, to make a better world for my new grandson to grow up in. How do you count the cost of losing our nation to nationalism?

Siblings in Christ, as we go to our Lord's Table this morning we are reminded of the cost already, our Lord's body broken for us, his blood poured out for us. But we also know the rewards. Forgiveness of sins. New Creation. God's Holy Spirit empowering us to be better human beings. Let us so strive for a new birth of freedom in our nation — but decidedly not through violent means of spilling someone else's blood but through the costly willingness to nonviolently stand in loving service to our neighbors.