

God's Commandments>Executive Orders

Preached by Rev. Ryan Wallace

At Fairmount Presbyterian Church

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In his first week in office, President Trump more signed more executive orders than any other US president signed in their first one hundred days.

All told, he's now signed 68 executive orders in 27 days.

And at the National Prayer breakfast last week, he announced an executive order calling for the formation of an "anti-Christian bias task force."

It begins:

"It is the policy of the United States, and the purpose of this order, to protect the religious freedoms of Americans and end the anti-Christian weaponization of government. The Founders established a Nation in which people were free to practice their faith without fear of discrimination or retaliation by their government...The law protects the freedom of Americans and groups of Americans to practice their faith in peace, and my Administration will enforce the law and protect these freedoms."

Now, I have a sneaking suspicion that this executive order wasn't written with Christians like me in mind—or churches like Fairmount for that matter. But I'd like to put this executive order to the test today.

Because I am a Christian—a Christian who would like to practice my faith in peace.

And I am an American—an American who would like to practice my faith without fear of discrimination or retaliation by my government.

As a U.S. citizen, I am granted these rights by the Constitution.

And as a Minister of Word and Sacrament, governed by the Presbyterian Book of Order, I have the right to *exercise freedom of conscience with respect to*

the interpretation of Scripture...captive to the Word of God, our confessions, and our polity.

But, most importantly, as a Christian, I feel called today—called to exercise these rights in this moment; to exercise my rights by raising my grievances with several other executive orders that infringe upon the practice of my faith.

Let's begin with Executive Order 14173, which aims to dismantle Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion programs and practices in public and private sectors

The order intends to “*combat illegal private-sector Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion preferences, mandates, policies, programs, and activities*” and “*devise a plan of specific steps or measures to deter DEI programs or principles.*”

And this order infringes upon the free practice of my Christian faith.

You see, on Sunday, October 20 of last year, I preached on Luke 7, the story of a woman who crashed a dinner party and washed Jesus' feet with her tears.

When the host complained that her presence was against the law; that she was not qualified to be at this dinner; that her kind didn't belong there; Jesus defended her. And he excoriated the host.

Jesus didn't apologize for breaking the rules either. Instead he celebrated her presence and the importance of her gifts there.

On that Sunday I said:

“For me, this is a biblical DEI message [with] three simple lessons for the church.

#1: If we refuse the gifts of some people, of any people, we deny our need for diversity, for the diverse gifts and perspectives that others bring.

Lesson #2: If we accept people's gifts without offering people a seat at the table, then we may be more diverse, but we're not practicing full equity.

And #3: if the Church welcomes all people, but asks them to check certain parts of who they are at the door, then we're practicing a kind of diversity without real inclusion.

And so we, the Church, are called to practice diversity and equity and inclusion.”

The president's executive order to outlaw DEI also conflicts with G-3.0103 in our Presbyterian Book of Order, which reads:

"The councils of the church shall give full expression to the rich diversity of the church's membership and shall provide for full participation and access to representation in decision-making and employment practices...Each church council shall develop procedures and mechanisms for promoting and reviewing that body's implementation of the church's commitment to inclusiveness and representation and to advocate for diversity in leadership."

And so, therefore, I oppose this executive order—proclaiming my faith without fear. For I fear God alone.

Next up: Executive Order 14168, which declares that the federal government will no longer recognize the legal identities of transgender or nonbinary people, and ends federal funding for transgender healthcare.

The order itself reads:

"My Administration will defend women's rights...by using clear and accurate language and policies that recognize women are biologically female, and men are biologically male...It is the policy of the United States to recognize two sexes, male and female. These sexes are not changeable and are grounded in fundamental and incontrovertible reality."

Once again this order infringes upon the free practice of my Christian faith.

On June 9, 2024, the Sunday after Fairmount marched in the Cleveland pride parade, I preached on Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, which are part of the levitical holiness codes.

These scripture verses are often cited to condemn and dehumanize our LGBTQ neighbors, even though they are only *teovah* in the Hebrew, purity codes specific to ancient Jewish culture, and not *mitzvot*, universal moral commandments from God.

And some of you may remember that I got out my bullhorn during that sermon, and I raised a concern that, while those condemning our LGBTQ siblings are happy to cite Leviticus 18 and 20, they seem to skip right over

Leviticus 19, which says: *“Do not go around slandering your people. Do not stand by while your neighbor’s blood is shed...instead, you must love your neighbor as yourself.”*

This executive order also conflicts with F-1.0404 in our Presbyterian Book of Order:

“In Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all creation, the Church seeks a new openness to God’s mission in the world...[including] a new openness in its own membership, becoming in fact as well as in faith a community of people of all ages, races, ethnicities, abilities, genders, and worldly conditions, made one in Christ by the power of the Spirit, as a visible sign of the new humanity.”

And so, therefore, I oppose this executive order—proclaiming my faith without fear. For I fear God alone.

Finally, the last issue I’d like to address is immigration.

Among the anti-immigrant executive orders the president signed on day one was an order titled: Protecting American People Against Invasion.

But instead I’d like to address a directive from the Department of Homeland Security issued on January 21, which rescinded long-standing guidelines for agents of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (otherwise known as ICE) and Customs and Border Protection (or CBP), so that they can now enter so-called ‘sensitive locations,’ including schools, hospitals, and congregations.

The directive reads:

“This action empowers the brave men and women in CBP and ICE to enforce our immigration laws and catch criminal aliens...who have illegally come into our country. Criminals will no longer be able to hide in America’s schools and churches to avoid arrest.”

This directive, too, infringes upon the free practice of my Christian faith.

On Sunday, June 30, 2024, I preached on Hebrews 13: *“Keep loving each other like family. Don’t neglect to open up your homes to guests, because by doing this some have been hosts to angels without knowing it.”*

In that sermon, I called Christian nationalists my enemies, who, instead of welcoming the stranger, distort the Gospel to demonize the stranger and spread fear and lies about them; they refuse to welcome Jesus himself, as Jesus says in Matthew 25.

And I said:

“The Gospel demands that I love my neighbors...Even my enemies. Yes, even those calling themselves Christians who disgust me with their words and their actions.

But right now to be honest my real concern is for our most vulnerable neighbors...for our neighbors who are immigrants and refugees, because according to the Gospel, being a Christian very plainly means welcoming immigrants and loving them as our own.

I am also concerned for our neighbors who provide support to immigrants and refugees. Because extremist groups fueled by Great Replacement Theory have started targeting faith-based non-profits...accusing these organizations of promoting an invasion to displace white Americans by engaging in child trafficking and migrant smuggling.”

This Department of Homeland Security directive also conflicts with W-5.0305 in our Presbyterian Book of Order:

“God sends the Church to work for justice in the world: exercising its power for the common good; dealing honestly in personal and public spheres; seeking dignity and freedom for all people; welcoming strangers in the land; promoting justice and fairness in the law; overcoming disparities between rich and poor; bearing witness against systems of violence and oppression; and redressing wrongs against individuals, groups, and peoples.”

And so, therefore, I oppose this directive—proclaiming my faith without fear. For I fear God alone.

One last thing.

Earlier I mentioned that the president revealed his plans for this anti-Christian bias task force at the National Prayer breakfast last week.

And in speech he gave at that prayer breakfast, the president said:

“Just steps away from here...is the statue of John Winthrop, who famously proclaimed that America would stand as ‘a city upon a hill, a light to all nations with the eyes of all people upon us.’

Today, almost 400 years after that famous sermon, we see that with the Lord’s help, the city stands taller and shines brighter than ever before – or at least it soon will.”

Now some of you may recall that I addressed the history of that speech from John Winthrop last November, on Christ the King Sunday.

I read you a cease and desist letter I wrote to all the U.S. presidents who have co-opted Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount by referring to the United States as the city on a hill.

And so I get to quote myself one last time this morning.

“The United States of America is not the city upon a hill

It never has been, and it never will be.

The United States of America is not the “world’s best hope” as Thomas Jefferson claimed in his first inaugural address;

nor is it the “last best hope of earth” as Abraham Lincoln said to Congress in 1862.

America is not my religion, and no political party will ever be my denomination.

The Constitution is not my sacred text;

capitalism is not my god;

I will not pledge allegiance to any flag;

and no president will ever be my king or my savior.”

Today, just as I did on Christ the King Sunday, I proclaim that: My *only* comfort—in body and soul, in life and in death—is that I belong to God!

I belong to God alone.

I fear God alone.

I owe my life to God alone.

Those who give their life away to something or someone else will lose it.

But those who give their life to the Gospel—those who are even willing to lose their life for the sake of the Gospel—they will find it, says Jesus.

“Blessed are those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kin-dom of heaven.”