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First of all let me thank you all for the invitation to be here this morning. I grew up in this country. My parents are immigrants from Europe -- from Greece and Germany respectively -- and they inculcated in me a great pride in their adopted country, so to testify here is for me a high privilege indeed.

This morning I testify as an American and as a Christian. What it is to be an American and what it is to be a Christian can be tremendously misunderstood, so let me be clear here as I set out, in stating that I believe that in the true sense, both of these identities, American and Christian, are identities that are not tribalistic, but that bring with them a sense of obligation for others and a perspective that is by definition focused on others.

For example, to be an American is not to be part of any ethnic group, but to part of something that transcends ethnicity. To be an American is to buy into an idea that pluralism is good and that a multiplicity of peoples and ideologies and races and religions can co-exist. This is at the heart of the American experiment. And to be an American is to buy into the idea that not only can they co-exist, but that in co-existing civilly, they will add up to a sum greater than their parts.  
(1)

And to be a Christian is likewise to know that one is not part of an ethnic group, but of a group that transcends and potentially includes all ethnic groups. So true Americans and true Christians can never be tribalists or racists. If we ever put one group above another group we are denying ourselves and the core beliefs that make us Americans or Christians.

I've written a biography of the great German pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer who spoke up for the Jews when very few Germans were doing so. Why did he do that? Why did he risk his life to get seven Jews out of Germany and into neutral Switzerland so that their lives might be saved?

Bonhoeffer stood up for the Jews for one reason: because he was a Christian. Not a mere church-goer, nor a mere Gentile, but a Christian. Bonhoeffer famously once said that only he who speaks out for the Jews can sing Gregorian chants. In other words, anyone who claims to be a Christian and who does not do whatever he can to help the persecuted Jews has no right to claim to be a Christian. That person is only a hypocrite and a betrayer of the Christian faith. (2)

But why? Is this a mere assertion by me and by Bonhoeffer? No. At the heart of the Christian faith is the idea that God blesses us so that we might bless others. He gives us whatever he gives us for others.

Indeed, it's in Genesis that God states this, in the context of making the first Jew, Abraham. He says he will bless Abraham SO THAT Abraham can bless others... He will bless the Jews and he CHOOSES the Jews... The Christian believes that God chose the Jews as his own people so that out of them he might bring Himself to the whole world beyond the Jews, so that he might out of the Jewish people raise up His Messiah, who would bring Him -- the God of the Jews -- to the

ends of the earth... So the Jews are blessed to be a blessing. They are chosen out of all groups in the world, specifically to bless the whole world.

The Bible also says every human being is made in God's image and he loves us all equally, so to serve God we must serve others. In fact, Dietrich Bonhoeffer says that Jesus Christ is "the man for others." The self-giving "agape" love of Jesus is the love that gives at the expense of one's self, knowing that whatever we do to bless others God will replenish. To be a Christian is to love and serve others. (3)

When Hitler began persecuting Jews in 1933, Bonhoeffer wrote an essay titled "The Church and the Jewish Question" declaring that it was the duty of German Christians to stand up for the Jews, indeed for any group that is in any way being persecuted.

But this is an American belief, too, although I daresay you can guess where we got it from. America is not a democracy, but a republic. Majorities don't decide what is true. In America, minorities are protected when necessary, because we believe what the Bible teaches, that some truths are transcendent and not subject to plebiscite, and one of those ideas is the dignity of every human being, despite his beliefs or racial or ethnic makeup. We are inherently sacred because we are made in God's image. So God commands every Christian to stand up for those being treated unjustly or persecuted in anyway. And in America we have enshrined that into our laws.

So today as a Christian and an American I declare that anyone who sees things from a tribalist or racist perspective -- as anti-Semitism is one especially prominent expression -- then that person declares himself not to understand the Christian faith and not to be a Christian. The true Christian knows that his enemy is not the Jew, but his enemy is the enemy of the Jew. (4)

One final point. Throughout history Gentiles -- which is to say those who are not Jewish -- have often been confused with Christians. Often they have themselves encouraged and participated in this confusion. But a mere Gentile is no Christian. All dedicated Nazis were Gentiles. None were Christians. To be a Christian is to know that you have -- according to the New Testament -- been "grafted in" to the Jewish faith. Your Messiah and your God, Jesus, is a Jew and all of his disciples are Jews. Your faith is distinctly Jewish. In our estimation it is the final bloom of that plant whose roots go back to Abraham and Moses and David and all the prophets.

On Kristallnacht in 1938, one of the worst expressions of anti-Semitism in the history of the world, Bonhoeffer for the first time made the very dramatic leap into seeing an attack on Jews as an attack on God himself. So Christians who think of themselves as some tribal group in opposition to Jews are profoundly deluded and must be called out as such. To demonize any group based on what they believe or their ethnic makeup is to admit that one's own beliefs are not in the God of the Bible but in a counterfeit God who is in fact the ancient enemy of that God.

Not to stand up to attacks against any group, especially Jews, is to deny the transcendent truth that we are all created in God's image with certain inalienable rights. Bonhoeffer said that "Silence in the face of evil is itself evil. God will not hold us guiltless. Not to speak is to speak. Not to act is to act."

To do nothing when anti-Semitism raises its head is to hasten the death of civil society.

Everyone who has the privilege to call himself a Christian or an American must stand against these things and not just stand against them but take action against them.

We must recall the words of Bonhoeffer's friend, Martin Niemoller, who wrote his famous poem...

*First they came for the communists,  
and I didn't speak out because I wasn't a communist.  
Then they came for the socialists,  
and I didn't speak out because I wasn't a socialist.  
Then they came for the trade unionists,  
and I didn't speak out because I wasn't a trade unionist.  
Then they came for me,  
and there was no one left to speak for me.*

Niemoller did not speak up until it was too late. And his poem cautions us to speak out when any group is being persecuted. This is the right thing and the Christian thing to do. God commands it.