

Sunday, July 21, 2024

Hello, I'm Reverend Rick Guhl, a retired United Church of Christ pastor... and I have a great feeling of dread about the upcoming election.

The prospect of Donald Trump getting re-elected makes me fear for our nation. In fact, I find myself caught in a web of trauma thinking, bouncing between disbelief and despair, anxiety and anger, remorse and rage. I feel trapped in a hopeless state, both agitated and overwhelmed.

I understand the stakes. I see the link to the dark paths of the middle of the 20th century and I fear we will go down the same deadly road as Germany, Italy and Japan did then.

You see, my parents both served in the American Embassy in Berlin before the war, my mom as a secretary and my dad as an assistant to the Naval Attaché. They both spoke and understood German. They heard the fascist rhetoric 24/7, and I know this because my mom said it made the hairs on the back of her neck stand up.

And what did they hear from Hitler and the Nazi Regime?

They heard Hitler snarling that he would make Germany great again, just as Mussolini boasted he would restore the glory of Rome and the Japanese militarists growled that they would claim Japan's rightful place in the sun.

They heard dehumanizing language directed at despised peoples: Jews and others, describing them as vermin and scum, as dangerous and defective, as disease-ridden and degenerate, as criminals, as those polluting the nation.

They heard Hitler promising revenge against Germany's enemies, promising to rid the nation of those who polluted Germany's pure blood and of those he accused had stabbed Germany in the back.

They heard threats of violence, and saw it played out in Kristallnacht, when the Nazis attacked Jewish businesses and synagogues and sent 10,000 Jewish men to the concentration camps, which inevitably would become death camps. They heard him promising to exterminate Europe's Jews.

I hear echoes of all this and more in the rhetoric of Trump and his supporters and in the Project 2025.

Then, it was Make Germany Great Again. Today, it's Make America Great Again. Then, the despised people were the Jews and the Rom and the LGBTQ and the disabled. Today, the despised are those making arduous treks to cross our Southern border, and Jews and the LGBTQ. Then, Hitler accused them of being dangerous and disease ridden, polluting Germany's purity, bringing crime and drugs.

Today, they speak of rounding up 11 allegedly million illegal immigrants and sending them to camps for deportation. Does anyone really believe that when their Brownshirts sweep through neighborhoods they will care about such niceties as citizenship?

Just as Germany burned books and turned schools into factories of propaganda, we're seeing book bans and plans to turn schools into factories of propaganda.

Just as Hitler attacked the free press as the "lying press", Trump and his allies attack our free press as "fake news."

Just as Hitler accused the LGBTQ community of being degenerate, Trump calls them groomers and sexual predators.

Just as Hitler had underlings to carry out his evil plans, men like Russell Vought and Kevin Roberts are talking about declaring martial law on January 20th to implement Project 2025.

My dad, my uncle, and my father-in-law all served in the great struggle to crush fascism in Germany, Italy and Japan. Their graves, and those of sixteen million others who participated in that struggle in WW2, and especially the half million killed or missing in action, are scattered in cemeteries around the United States and overseas.

Now, Trump and his allies want to bring fascism into our country through the front door.

It pains me to say this, but they are spitting on the graves of those sixteen million. Every Republican who refuses to denounce the fascist rhetoric and plans are spitting on their graves.

Ultimately, it all comes back to us, you and me, as voters.

Will we spit on the graves of the sixteen million WW2 veterans by electing Trump? Will we spit on their graves by giving our votes to Republicans who are on board with this ugly fascism? Will that legacy be etched into our gravestones? And even if it won't there physically, you will know... and God will know.