

Kevin's Korner

Do you recognize the name, Israel Baline? He was born in a Jewish village in Russia in 1888 but moved with his family to America as a refugee at the age of 5, after an anti-Jewish mob destroyed their family home. His father died when he was 8, so he went to work selling newspapers to help support his family. He also learned to play the piano and began writing songs, very popular songs. After a publishing error on his name, he continued to publish his music as Irving Berlin.

While serving in the U.S. Army in 1918 he wrote a song for a troop musical called "God Bless America," which he later offered to Kate Smith, one of the great singers of his day. Before giving it to her, he edited the words just a bit. He removed the words, "to the right," which already had political implications, asking instead for God to guide America, "through the night with the light from above." He also removed "victorious," wanting a song of peace, not military conquest. He wanted a song that would bring Americans together, not set them apart.

I've always enjoyed singing "God Bless America," especially with followers of Jesus. I sing it as a prayer for all of America and for all people who reside in America, including refugees like Irving Berlin, who have helped to answer this prayer for God to bless America.

I want to thank God for the blessings so many enjoy, living in America. I only wish those blessings could be more widely spread. I certainly thank God for the public servants; military, police and other community, state and federal workers; many of whom have made horrible sacrifices in the name of freedom and democracy, including freedom of religion. I am saddened when they are called to sacrifice for less honorable endeavors, often related to conquest of some sort.

I have no illusions of America being more deserving or more pure, or more Christian, than any other nation. We are imperfect human beings who have been blessed with much, who have accomplished much for the greater good despite mistakes and failures along the way. I am grateful that God has indeed blessed America in so many ways! I'm also grateful that God has blessed all

the nations in many ways and all of God's good creation! I want to continue singing "God Bless America," as I want to join Irving Berlin, Israel Baline, in wanting to focus on what is right with America and the world and what brings people together, rather than "set Americans apart." I want to give thanks, constantly, for the blessings of God, which so many enjoy in this community, state and nation.

But my highest allegiance is not to nation, but to God who blesses and guides every nation and every person. I feel that I can serve God best by finding, celebrating and serving the good in the world today. Being critical is almost always divisive in today's world, so I bite my tongue often. But I do and will serve Jesus who prioritized loving and serving God and neighbor, and even enemy, for the good of all. I will follow Jesus who proclaimed his mission on earth is to "bring good news to the poor... proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

May this be the "year of the Lord's favor"! May I, and we at FCC, do our part in making it such a year for God's glory and God's loving purposes. Love has to be the answer, our answer, no matter what!

God bless you!

Pastor Kevin