

#19 A Time For War

Peter Muhlenberg – January 21, 1776

Scripture – Ecclesiastes 3:1-11

PASTOR MUHLENBERG stood in the vestry of his church, putting on his traditional pastoral robes as he had on so many other Sunday mornings. A sense of destiny filled the air around him. This was the last time he would enter his pulpit, the last time he would open the Bible and share the Word of life with his congregation.

He knew the sermon he had to preach – yet he knew that some of his people would not understand or accept his position. He himself had wrestled with it for months: How involved should a pastor be in the affairs of government? Didn't Jesus say, "**Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's.**" Matthew 22:21? Would Christ get involved? Would he run to the battle? It was hard to imagine Jesus carrying a weapon. But it was equally hard to imagine Him not taking a stand.



"To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven:" Pastor Muhlenberg proclaimed, reading from Ecclesiastes 3. **"A time to be born, and a time to die;"** ... **"A time to weep, and a time to laugh;"** ... **"a time of war, and a time of peace."** He stopped and looked at the people God had put in his care – hardworking farmers and their wives, merchants, recent immigrants. The tiny town of Woodstock, Virginia, was a long way from the fighting in the colonies of New England. And the Blue Ridge Mountains had kept its citizens from the news of events in their own state in early January 1776.

"It is a time for war!" Pastor Muhlenberg declared. "And not only in New England. War has come to Virginia! The British have marched on our own city of Williamsburg, seizing our supply of gunpowder and munitions. Soldiers are entering private homes, homes just like ours."

"It is time for war! **'We are only farmers,'** you may say. Patrick Henry has rallied five thousand men – farmers just like you – to fight back and drive the British out. It is time to act! Many of us came to this country to practice our religious freedoms. It is time to fight for those freedoms that we hold so dear. It is time for war!"

"Let us pray." With that, Pastor Muhlenberg bowed his head and offered the traditional closing prayer. Then, breaking with all tradition, while still standing in the pulpit, he began to remove his pastor's robes and vestments. "I am a clergyman, it is true. But I am also a patriot – and my liberty is

as dear to me as to any man. Shall I hide behind robes, sitting still at home, while others spill their blood to protect my freedom? Heaven forbid it!"

"I am called by my country to its defense. The cause is just and noble. I am convinced it is my duty to obey that call, a duty I owe to my God and to my country."

With that, he threw off the final layer of his robes – and now stood before his stunned congregation in the full uniform of an officer of the Continental militia. He marched to the back of the church, declaring to all, "If you do not choose to be involved, if you do not fight to protect your liberties, there will soon be no liberties to protect!"



Just outside the church army drummers waited. At Pastor Muhlenberg's command they began to beat out the call for recruits. God's conviction fell on the men of the congregation. One by one they rose from their pews and took their stand with the drummers. Some three hundred men from the church joined their pastor that day to fight for liberty.

Pastor Muhlenberger and his men became the Eighth Virginia Regiment, who fought valiantly in many battles of the Revolutionary War. During the war, Muhlenberg was promoted to major-general. After the war he was a hero second only to General George Washington among the Germans of his native state of Pennsylvania. In 1783 he became vice-president of Pennsylvania (Benjamin Franklin was president). He worked hard to influence others to adopt the Federal Constitution of 1787 and served in the First U.S. Congress in 1789-91.

Pastor Peter Muhlenberg had a brother, Frederick Muhlenberg, also a pastor. At first, Frederick criticized Peter for getting involved in the war, saying that a "minister of the gospel should not be involved in politics."

But when the British arrived in New York City in 1777, they drove Frederick from his church and then desecrated the building. Frederick rethought his position and joined in the fight for liberty. In 1789 he became America's very first Speaker of the House of Representatives. In fact, his signature is one of only two on the Bill of Rights.

Taken from "Under God" by Toby Mac and Michael Tait