

It was nice to know that the public radio announcer didn't quite know how to pronounce the last name of the San Francisco quarterback, Colin Kaepernick. He clearly had other issues that were of more importance than a back up quarterback in the NFL. Kaepernick's name is pronounced with a short *a* rather than a long *a* the radio announcer used.. (If you don't know Kaepernick's name, you probably have done a wonderful job of evading the tsunami that is sports reporting in general and football reporting in particular.) Kaepernick has created a controversy in the mind of some and a national conversation in the mind of others by refusing to stand during the national anthem prior to the NFL games that he plays in. The San Francisco quarterback has used his player status to draw attention to the inequalities that exist in the United States and has noted that in the land of the free and the home of the brave, not everyone is truly free.

If nothing else, there certainly has been a great deal of hot air, type, and tweets that have been expended on critiquing or supporting Kaepernick's actions. Some of it is valuable in the evolution of our public conversation on equality and freedom in our country as we are firmly rooted in the 21st century. Regardless of the position you have or have not taken on Kaepernick's protest and its form, I find the physical reality of sitting rather than standing to be of interest. Furthermore, there is an interesting connection between the actions on the sidelines of what some dub "America's National Religion" and the actions of our religious services week in and week out. This connection I find interesting and filled with meaning.

The relationship between what happens on a football sideline prior to the game and the liturgy of Sunday morning became more apparent for me as Colin Kaepernick explored his national anthem protest. To begin, his protest was to sit during the national anthem, while everyone else stood. Sitting was a distinct sign of disrespect in the mind of some and a clear challenge to the status quo in the mind of others. After a week, however, Kaepernick shifted the form of the protest. No longer was he sitting. Now, while most everyone else stood, he knelt on the ground. (You might sense where I am going with this.) Standing. Sitting. Kneeling.

What does it all mean?

On the football field and during the national anthem, standing signifies respect, sitting suggests disrespect. Kneeling? Well, now that is interesting. As the band U2 notes in their lyric from the song *Mysterious Ways*, "If you want to kiss the sky, better learn how to kneel." There is something compelling about kneeling. Might Kaepernick's kneeling express a bit of the essence that U2 captures and is a part of the very heart of religion down through the ages? Is our getting closer to the earth a way of connecting to those things and that Thing that ultimately transcends our realities?

On the part of Kaepernick, I actually think there is a bit of truth here. He shifted his protest from sitting, which could be seen as the sullen, rebellious kid in all of us taking a time out, to kneeling, which is a protest that now seems to honor the weight and depth of what is being critiqued and recognizes that physical form can convey reverence and devotion. The protest takes on a different character. The protest, by shifting body posture, no longer reflects insolence. Rather, the quality of the protest has changed. Whether Kaepernick knows it or not, kneeling has connected him to a richer vein in the annals of protest. Certainly, one may protest; it is at the

heart of our democracy. However, posture has the potential to reflect a stance *for* something as well, and, if nothing else, an awareness of the sacredness of things amidst the protest.

I suppose that all of this can be a huge psychologizing and reading way to deeply into the actions of one individual. Yet, I do believe that there is meaning here, and meaning for us. Standing, Sitting, Kneeling. Beyond the calisthenics of worship, our body posture can *speak* about what we feel, think, believe. Standing certainly is a sign of respect in worship. We stand as the cross guides us into and out of worship. Respect. Yet, standing also possesses a slightly different character when we stand for communion. Here the posture connotes thanksgiving or praise. To borrow from the sports analogy, it is what we naturally do when we witness a great play or (or dance for that matter). We automatically rise up out of our seats. Eucharist means thanksgiving. That is expressed, albeit in a more reserved way, by our bodies at the altar.

Sitting is the status quo for our service. However, kneeling brings us back to that U2 lyric. There is something about kneeling that physically forces us to acknowledge another reality or a larger context, which ultimately (hopefully?) connects us to that which is larger than ourselves. Of course, this posture is derived from the kingly courts of old and the obeisance that was due the lord or king. Certainly, this aspect remains a part of our tradition. Kneeling is a sign of the utmost respect. However, I wonder if kneeling also has evolved over time? That is it is not simply obeisance to power. Rather, may it be seen as humility and mindfulness of our station in life? Amidst all the things that we control, the work that we do, the responsibilities we fulfill, and the agency with which we engage this life, are we also attentive to the fragility of life, the interconnectedness we share with others and other life forms, the serendipity that is each day? If kneeling is the highest form of respect, then perhaps we should all kneel for the National Anthem, within our worship service, and in many more places in life.