Synopsis of the Friday Sermon delivered by Ameer Mustapha Elturk on June 27, 2014

“United We Stand, Divided We Fall”

The motto, “United we stand, divided we fall,” has been widely used by nations and songwriters. The slogan is usually invoked at times of war and conflict. The phrase is attributed to the ancient Greek storyteller Aesop. A similar phrase also appears in the biblical New Testament –“And if a house be divided against itself, that house cannot stand” (Mark 3:25). Similar verses of the New Testament include Matthew 12:25, “And Jesus knew their thoughts, and said unto them, every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand.”

The subject of unity was also stressed by Prophet Muhammad (SAW). He (SAW) clasped his hands with the fingers interlaced and said, “A believer to another believer is like a solid brick structure, each brick supports the other.” Unity is ordained upon the believers by Allah (SWT), “Cling unto the rope of Allah all of you and be not divided” (Aal ‘Imran, 3:103). He (SWT) warns, “Do not be like those who divided and differed after clear signs have come to them and for them is a severe torment” (Aal ‘Imran, 3:105). It is clear that the divine message is that of unity and not division. United we stand, divided we fall.

The conflicts in the Middle East are very troubling and unprecedented. We have had our share in the course of history of wars and bloodshed but never at this scale. The conflict does not involve Muslims against a common enemy. Sadly, it is from within, Muslims against Muslims, sunnis against shias, and shias against sunnis. These actions are not sanctioned in our faith. We are not permitted to take the life of any innocent person, what to speak of taking the life of a brother in faith. “If anyone slays a human being-unless it be [in punishment] for murder or for spreading corruption on earth-it shall be as though he had slain all mankind; whereas, if anyone saves a life, it shall be as though he had saved the lives of all mankind” (al-Ma‘idah, 5:32).

Human life is sacred in Islam. Taking the life of anyone without just cause is plain forbidden in Islam. The Prophet (SAW) insisted, “All things of a Muslim are forbidden for his brother in faith, his blood, his honor and his wealth. The Muslim is a brother of another Muslim. He does not oppress nor humiliate him. Piety (taqwa) is here, piety is here (the Prophet (SAW) would point to his heart). It is a serious evil that he should look down upon his brother.”

Muslims today carry weapons with the intention to kill their brothers and sisters. “But whoever deliberately slays another believer, his recompense shall be hell, to abide therein (forever); And the wrath and curse of Allah are upon him: and a dreadful penalty is prepared for him” (al-Nisa’, 4:93). Hence, what justifies the killing of one’s own brother or sister in faith? What justifies the killing of innocent souls? What justifies the destruction of people’s homes, businesses, infrastructure, shrines, mosques, etc?

What is happening in the Middle East concerns all of us here in America. No one likes what is taking place. We feel their pain. We must, however, acknowledge that we can’t solve the problems in the Middle East
or any place overseas. The problem is larger than us. We must not allow the sectarianism that is plaguing the Middle East to spill over into our communities. We must remain united. United we stand, divided we fall.

The Muslim community (shia and sunni) in Southeast Michigan is united and will continue to be united, insha Allah. We are sending a clear message and setting an example of unity where multi-ethnic and multi-madhahib Muslims live together in peace and harmony under the rule of law.

Allah (SWT) commanded unity not war. “Cling unto the rope of Allah all of you and be not divided” (Aal ‘Imran, 3:103). The statement “all of you” is added for emphasis and also for inclusivity. “All of you” means anyone who testifies, “There is no god except Allah, and Muhammad is the Messenger of God.” In other words, all who follow Muhammad (SAW) and proclaim the unity of God must unite regardless of one’s sect or school of thought, be he a Salafi, Sufi, Sunni, Shii, Hanafi, Shafii, Maliki, Hanbali or Ja’fari.

Islam is not a narrow path. It is a wide highway. It accommodates all and there is room for everyone. It is by the grace of God that we have this diversity of thought. We must respect each other, unite and renounce division as we have been commanded by the almighty God, “Cling unto the rope of Allah all of you and be not divided” (Aal ‘Imran, 3:103). The command is very categorical. The forceful imperative includes the directive, “and be not divided” for additional emphasis. The ayah ends with a profound message. The message is simple and clear, division may lead to hell.

Allah (SWT) relates the enmity between the two tribes of Banu Aws and Banu Khazraj in Yathrib (al-Madinah) that led to revenge-based wars for decades. Islam changed their catastrophic condition. Unity and brotherhood was achieved only due to their readiness to get rid of their fanaticism and prejudice. “And remember the favor of Allah on you when you were enemies, then He united your hearts so by His favor you became brothers; and you were on the brink of a pit of fire, then He saved you from it; thus does Allah make clear to you His message that you may follow the right guidance” (Aal ‘Imran, 3:103). Islam shattered the barriers of disunity and brought hearts together.

We must refrain from labeling ourselves, a sunni, shii, salafi, sufí, hanafi, maliki, shafii, hanbali or jaafari. We are Muslims. I am a Muslim. You are a Muslim. A profound ayah in surat Fussilat states, “And who could be better in speech than one who calls unto Allah, acts righteously and says ‘I am of those who are Muslims’” (Fussilat, 41:33). None of the above labels were used by God. He (SWT) taught us to say, “I am a Muslim.”

The only sure way to rid ourselves of fanaticism and prejudice is to have genuine taqwa of Allah, i.e. to be mindful of Allah (SWT) and attentive to His commands. Not so surprising, the ayah that precedes the command of unity mandates all believers to be conscious of Allah (SWT), “O you who believe have taqwa (be mindful) of Allah, as is His due and die not except as a Muslim” (Aal ‘Imran, 3:102). Hence, unity depends on genuine piety. The Prophet (SAW) while pointing to his heart stated, “Piety is here, piety is here, piety is here.” One may then conclude, when the hearts are purified, unity manifests itself as it did with the two tribes of al-Madinah. United we stand, divided we fall.

The way to attain genuine piety is, “Cling unto the rope of Allah” (Aal ‘Imran, 3:103). According to one narration related by a prominent companion of the Prophet (SAW) Abdullah Ibn Mas’oud, “The rope of Allah is the Book of Allah.” In another narration by Abi Sa’eed al-Khudari, the Prophet (SAW) said, “The Book of Allah is the rope of Allah stretched from the heavens to earth.” Technically, ropes have tensile strength and are usually used for pulling and lifting. The Prophet did claim that, “The Book of Allah is the strongest rope.” The Book of Allah possesses the power to pull us all together and unite us. The choice is ours.

The Imams (shia and sunni) of the Imams Council of the Michigan Muslim Community Council (MMCC) and community leaders of Southeast Michigan recently met and discussed the current conflict in Iraq. The objective of the meeting was to re-affirm the Muslim Code of Honor signed by the Imams in May of 2007.
as a result of the then sectarianism. The Imams remain united and in solidarity against sectarianism, disunity and division. They are committed to making sure the present condition of sectarianism in Iraq does not spill over into our communities.

The Imams agree that the conflict in Iraq is political in nature and not necessarily a sunnii/shia one. They condemned all types of extremism, especially violent extremism. They vowed to always speak against violence for violence begets violence. Peaceful dialogue is the only way to resolving conflicts, the Imams concluded. They are keen on protecting our communities from any potential sectarianism.

The Imams admitted, “We cannot solve the problems of the Middle East. Our attention should be focused here on domestic issues.” The Muslim community in America is facing many problems such as hate and islamophobia. Other issues involve our youth such as drugs, homosexuality, atheism to name a few.

The Imams caution our youth from being brainwashed by any faction through the internet or any social media outlet in an attempt to recruit fighters from the US. The Imams have a strong desire to protect our youth. Our youth must be clever enough to recognize that our religion is being hijacked by terrorists who serve specific agendas and not be trapped.

The Imams are calling for peace. Nearly 24 Imams and community leaders who were present at the meeting signed the reaffirmation of the Muslim Code of Honor which reads:

1) We reaffirm the Muslim Code of Honor signed by Shia and Sunni imams, on May 10th, 2007. The signed agreement calls for Shia and Sunni communities, led by the imams, to live together peacefully in America acknowledging fundamental differences among madhahib. It is imperative, upon signing the Code of Honor that we work towards maintaining and enhancing good relationships among us.

2) Adhering to the Code of Honor, we must encourage respectful language in our institutions and discourage speech or material that engages in rhetoric of takfir or disrespect of Muslim scholars and leaders - traditional or contemporary.

3) Be aware that there are some who promote discord and fitna. We must not allow such parties to distract us, for the sake of Muslim Americans who live and struggle for a dignified existence for Islam and Muslims. We remember Allah (SWT)’s commandment: “And hold fast, all together, to the rope of God, and be not divided among yourselves. And remember with gratitude God’s favor upon you, when you were enemies and He joined your hearts in love. Thus by His grace you became brethren. And you were on the brink of the Fire, and He saved you from it. Thus doth God make His Signs clear to you, that you may be guided. So let there arise out of you a band of people inviting to all that is good, enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong. They are the ones to attain felicity. And be not like those who are divided amongst themselves and fall into disputations after receiving clear signs. For them is a dreadful penalty” (3:103-05).

4) We encourage our national organizations, moreover, through the example of our brotherly cooperation in SE Michigan, to honor the terms of the Code of Honor we signed. We stand ready to work with anyone towards this goal to promote true spirit of peaceful coexistence and respect among all. We ask God the Exalted to aid us in this and all our efforts to conduct ourselves in a manner that is most pleasing to Him.