

The Fourth Sunday After Pentecost, July 2, 2006, Liturgical Year "B"
ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S CHURCH IN THE TOWN OF TONAWANDA, NY

The Rev. Arthur W. Ward Jr. + Rector

Scripture: Psalm 33:12

"A Nation Forged by God's Word"

JULY 4, 1776 - INDEPENDENCE DAY

In a few days, we will be celebrating our independence as a free nation. 230 years ago, our Founding Fathers signed their names to a paper which declared their independence from the tyranny of the British Crown and which created the United States of America; a paper which also declared that *"All men are created equal and are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights."* A paper which insisted that *"life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness"* are chief among these God-given rights, and that no one person or group of people should have absolute power over a society. A paper which acknowledged God as *"The Supreme Judge of the World,"* and recognized *"The Laws of Nature and Nature's God."*

Although we celebrate July 4th, as our Independence Day, that day in 1776, was only the beginning of a long struggle. When King George III read our Declaration of Independence he didn't write back to Thomas Jefferson to say, "Nice piece of writing Tom, y'all enjoy your USA now, and send me a postcard from Colonial Williamsburg." No, it took seven long years of hardship, pain, suffering and great loss, before the Constitution that we hold dear could be written, before we could call ourselves free Americans.

It's easy to forget that everything in life that's good has a price; and that certainly goes for our freedom. Being patriotic is more than waving the flag, watching fireworks, having a picnic and eating hot dogs and apple pie. It's understanding where we've come from, why we're here, and what it takes to build a better life. In America, we can dream dreams and live those dreams as in no other land. This was the vision of our Founding Fathers. This is what they believed possible when a people received their freedom.

But they believed something else. If you look at the writings of the Founding Fathers and those who followed after them, it is clear that they also knew that if one was to succeed in this life, if our nation was to be prosperous, if our society was to fulfill its destiny, then it had to be built on the principles of its Creator. It had to be built on the written Word of God - the Holy Bible, and on the Living Word of God - the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the foundation upon which our nation was built; this is why what once was a little fledgling English colony has now become the greatest superpower the world has ever known. No civilization in world history has impacted the world politically, economically, militarily, and spiritually like the United States. We have been far from perfect, but overall the positive impact is immeasurable.

The Bible tells us in **Ps. 33:12**: *"Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD."*

Our Founding Fathers knew this and they lived it.

SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE?

And yet, in the schools and workplaces of America, in the halls of Congress and of the state legislatures, in the courts and in our universities, you would never know it. In fact, there is a conflict raging. It is a conflict of ideas, of principles, a conflict of two world views. One which argues that God and religion have no real place in the public square - that faith is purely a personal matter. Proponents of this world view contend that when our forefathers wrote in the Bill of Rights that *"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion,"* they meant a total separation of religion and government, a separation between God and state. So no more school prayer, no more Ten Commandments, no more learning about the great heroes of the faith or attaining a basic knowledge of the Old and New Testaments, or teaching Creationism in the classroom; even though these were perfectly legal and acceptable in our nation just fifty years ago.

Then there is the other worldview, the one which holds to the reality of a Creator who loves His creation, who has revealed himself to mankind and who has given us spiritual and moral principles to live by. Believers in

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this worldview affirm that prayer should be allowed in schools, that manger scenes can be displayed in public places, that the right to believe and express one’s faith can be part of governing institutions, without infringing on anyone’s religious liberty.

So the question remains, what did our Founding Fathers believe? What was their concept and understanding regarding the separation of Church and State? Let’s hear some of their thoughts as well as those of some of our leaders who followed after them, let’s find out what they believed in their own words, so that we might have a better understanding of the truth. Before we begin, it should be noted that not one of the ninety Founding Fathers who framed the First Amendment used the term, “the Separation of Church and State.”

WAS AMERICA A “CHRISTIAN” NATION?

President George Washington - *“It is impossible to govern rightly without God and the Bible.”* In fact, in 1779 while addressing a group of Delaware Indian chiefs, Washington declared, *“You do well to wish to learn our arts and ways of life, and above all, the religion of Jesus Christ... Congress will do everything to assist you in this wise intention.”* Can you imagine what the politically correct crowd would say if Washington said that today?

Benjamin Franklin (statesman, inventor, writer and ambassador) - *“...God governs in the affairs of men. And if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without His notice, is it probable that an empire can rise without His aid?”*

Patrick Henry - *“It cannot be emphasized too strongly or too often that this great nation was founded not by religionists, but by Christians, not on religions, but on the Gospel of Jesus Christ.”*

Benjamin Rush (first founder to call for free national public schools) – *“Let the children...be carefully instructed in the principles and obligations of the Christian religion. This is the most essential part of education. The great enemy of the salvation of man, in my opinion, never invented a more effectual means of extirpating (removing) Christianity from the world than by persuading mankind that it was improper to read the Bible at schools.”*

James Wilson (signer of the Constitution and one of the first Supreme Court justices) – *“Human law must rest its authority ultimately upon the authority of that law which is divine... Far from being rivals or enemies, religion and law are twin sisters, friends, and mutual assistants. Indeed, these two sciences run into each other.”*

President Thomas Jefferson - *“God who gave us life gave us liberty. Can the liberties of a nation be thought secure when we have removed their only firm basis, a conviction in the minds of the people that these liberties are the gift of God? Indeed, I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just, and that His justice can not sleep forever.”*

President Andrew Jackson - *“The Bible is a rock upon which our republic rests.”*

President Abraham Lincoln - *“I believe the Bible is the best gift God has given to man...But for this Book we could not know right from wrong.”*

President Calvin Coolidge - *“The foundation of our society and our government rests so much on the teachings of the Bible that it would be difficult to support them if faith in these teachings would cease to be practically universal in our country.”*

Or how about these statements from several of our State’s Constitutions:

Delaware: The State Constitution of 1779 required every office holder to make the following affirmation: *“I...do profess faith in God the Father, and in Jesus Christ His Only Son, and in the Holy Ghost, one God blessed forevermore; and I do acknowledge the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be given by Divine inspiration.”*

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Maryland: The State Constitution as late as 1864 required for every person appointed to any office of trust, “A declaration of belief in the Christian religion, or of the existence of God, and in the future state of rewards and punishment”

Mississippi’s Constitution of 1817 stated similar words: “no person who denies the being of God or a future state of rewards and punishments shall hold any office in the civil department of the state.”

This is only the “tip of the iceberg.” We could go on and on to show that on the federal and state levels there was an adherence to the belief in the only true and living God and to the principles of God’s Word. For most of our history, the courts too, have consistently acknowledged that America is a “Christian Nation.” Not meaning that Christianity is the established religion, but that its principles and its expression are part of who we are as a people, and therefore should be included not excluded from public life.

In fact, even our threefold form of government was taken from the Bible. One man who had a profound impact on American law was French philosopher, Baron Charles Montesquieu. Next to the Bible, he was the individual most quoted by the Founding Fathers. In 1748, he wrote “*The Spirit of Laws*,” in which he proposed separating the powers in government. He based his proposition on **Isaiah 33:22** which says, “*The Lord is our Judge* (the judicial branch), *the Lord is our Lawgiver* (the legislative branch); and *the Lord is our King*” (the executive branch). Thus, Montesquieu believed that governmental power should be divided into three branches. Why? To counter the effects of the inherent sinfulness of man and man’s desire for control. He knew, as did our Founding Fathers, that power without checks and balances (i.e. accountability) leads to abuse, corruption, and tyranny.

NO STATE CHURCH

And that’s why our Founding Fathers did not want a State Church. In England, the Anglican Church was headed by the King and was the State Church of England. In much of Europe, each nation had an officially established Church which collected taxes from the people and which were endorsed and helped by the reigning monarchy. As you can imagine, corruption and abuse were rampant. So to counter this, the framers of our constitution made sure that no one church or denomination would have official state sanction - and “Church” meant a specific branch of Christianity.

They did not mean taking God or Christ, or the Holy Bible, for that matter, out of public life. When people say “no” to prayer in school, to putting the Ten Commandments back on the walls of public schools, and use the principle of separation of Church and State, they are misusing the Bill of Rights. They are misapplying the principle by making it broader than it really is.

That was not the original intention of the founders of our republic. It’s just how our courts and society interpret things today. For the last fifty years secular humanism has influenced much of our nation’s culture. It hasn’t been immigrants or people of other religions who have tried to take God out of public life; it has been those who call themselves atheists and agnostics.

ONE GIRL WHO WASN’T AFRAID

I am reminded of what just happened last month to Brittany McComb, Valedictorian of Foothill High School in Nevada. Before she delivered her commencement speech, she met with Foothill administrators who edited her remarks taking out references to God, Jesus Christ, the Lord and the Bible. They warned her if she included them, they would cut her speech short. Well Brittany went ahead with her speech anyway. But then just as she was about to talk about how Jesus Christ had impacted her life, the school officials pulled the plug on her microphone. Later Brittany defended her action saying, “*I went through four years of school at Foothill and they taught me logic and they taught me freedom of speech. God’s the biggest part of my life. Just like other valedictorians thank their parents, I wanted to thank my Lord and Savior.*” I say, “Good for her!” Thankfully, just this past week a Christian Rights Advocacy Group, *The Rutherford Institute*, will be suing Clark County School

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Officials on behalf of Brittany. Her courage is to be commended and her actions should be defended on the grounds of free speech.

TRUE PATRIOTS

We can never forget that we are in a battle for the hearts and minds of our citizens. Our nation has been blessed because of the millions of Christians who have stood up for the truth of the Gospel and have followed the principles of God’s Word. And it is only when there is revival on the grassroots level that our nation can change for the better. And our nation has had many revivals - the “Great Awakenings” in our history.

And while there has been much injustice and many shortcomings - slavery, the subjugation of the Indians, the subservience of women, lack of civil rights, etc. It is because our worldview has been based on godly principles that it has allowed our nation to be changed for the better. The important thing is starting in the right place. That’s what God’s grace does! When we allow God to guide us, His Holy Spirit changes and transforms us into the kind of people He wants us to be.

What has America meant to our world? Listen to the words by 19th century poet, Emma Lazarus, that are inscribed at the base of the Statue of Liberty: *“Give me your downtrodden, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breath free, the wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, the tempest-tossed to me, I lift up my lamp beside the golden door!”* Such words echo the words of our Lord Jesus Christ in **Mt. 11:28** - *“Come to Me all you who are burdened and heavy laden and I will give you rest,”* and **Lev. 19:33-34**, *“When a stranger resides with you in your land, you shall do him no wrong. The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself.”*

What has America meant to our world? Look at recent history. What would have happened if the U.S. had not been powerful enough to prevail in World War 2? What would have happened if the U.S. did not prevail against Communism in the Cold War? What would happen if US doesn’t prevail against fundamentalist Islam? Would we be living the way we are living today - in freedom? NO! We would be living in a new dark age.

What has America meant to our world? Thousands of Christian missionaries sent, millions of Bibles published in other languages and sent the world over, the gospel proclaimed over the airwaves, and billions of dollars in aid to those in need, with millions of lives changed for the better.

In the early 1830’s as he was visiting America, French historian and political scientist, Alexis de Tocqueville was amazed to see the number of churches and the people who attended them. He observed that *“America is still the place where the Christian religion has kept its greatest real power over men’s souls,”* and further wrote, *“America is great because America is good. If America ceases to be good, it will cease to be great.”* America is great because of its godly citizens. Citizens who have not been afraid to stand up for the principles of Almighty God - for truth, love, justice, life, liberty, and faith, that’s America has prospered.

LET US NOT FORGET!

So this weekend, let us not forget what has made our country great. Let us remember why we have been given the privilege and responsibility of leading our world. And may we never be ashamed of the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ but may we build our lives upon God’s Word, always praying that our fellow citizens do the same. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN!