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[0:00] Amen. Please be seated. For those of you not familiar with Facebook, you can do a post or write something that's interesting to you and then people can comment on it.

! And so, you know, I've got a lot of friends on Facebook and they often comment on posts I make. So this week, my post was, is Independence Day a religious holiday?

Interesting question, right? Is Independence Day a religious holiday? I got 33 comments back. I'm just going to list five of them.

The first one was, no! Right to the point, right? But there were others. Another said, it's a civil holiday which must not be proclaimed in church on Sunday.

Okay. Right? Another interesting sarcastic remark. Sure, it's civil religion if you're in Nazi Germany. Well, okay.

[1:12] And then on the more positive side, you know, it's good to honor and pray for the country on its birthday. Yeah, we can go with that. And then it says, we must remember America in church.

It's one of God's greatest miracles. Not bad. And then one who's resolute. Well, of course it's a religious holy day for Americans.

And then we should mention it on Independence Day because God brought us from bondage by a tyrant to religious and political freedom.

One last comment by our friend Nigel Mumford. His comment was, God bless America. So what do we do when Independence Day lands on a Sunday?

How do we deal with that? Do we just forget it and go on with business? Or do we bring it into our worship? Well, the Book of Common Prayer helps us with that.

[2:12] Because for Sunday, it gives us a collect, a prayer, which I read at the beginning of the service, focusing on our nation and the gift God's given us.

And it gives us scripture lessons that were read by these gentlemen here, which give the source of where we come from, thinking that we can be an independent nation based on freedom.

So let's take a look at that today. First of all, we look at that collect, the prayer that was read. Collect means a thematic prayer to use for the day.

It says, Lord God, by your providence, by your care, our founders won their liberties of old.

We're going to talk about that in a minute. But this prayer, which all of us are to think about as we talk to God today, says that our nation was founded by people following God, looking for freedom for its people.

[3:18] And then the petition is, grant that we, that's all of us, we and all the people of this land may have grace to exercise these liberties in righteousness and peace.

Now that may sound right wing, but it's not. It's Christian. It's down the road. We're called to protect those liberties that were won for us 245 years ago.

So, all right, that gives us a direction of where we're going. Now, it's interesting that our founders, many of which, by the way, who were Anglicans, it's interesting that our founders went to the scriptures to figure out who we are as a people in America.

Let me read a couple of portions of the Declaration of Independence, July 4th, 1776. I just dropped half the declaration.

And it was the best half. Okay. So, a team of five people on the Continental Congress were called to write up a document of independence.

[4:32] And the main writer was, of course, we know Thomas Jefferson. And then he had help from John Adams, Ben Franklin, Roger Sherman, and Robert Livingston of New York State.

All right. So, this is what they put together and was unanimously passed by the Continental Congress, July 4th, 1776.

Follow this carefully because it really tells us who we are. It says, When in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth the separate and equal status to which the laws of nature, oh, and by the way, of nature's God, entitle them.

A decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to separation. There's the preamble. This sets the stage for what's coming next.

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness, that to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, that whenever any form of government becomes destructive to these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it and to establish new government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form.

[6:27] Everybody still awake? Thomas Jefferson starts to get a little boring here, but sorry. All right. He probably did a lot better job than I could have done.

Prudence, indeed, will dictate that governments long established should not be changed for light or transient purposes.

Need to hear that today. And accordingly, all experience has shown that mankind are more disposed to suffer when evils are sufferable than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed.

But when a long train of abuses, usurpations, pursuing invariably the same object, evinces a design to reduce them under absolute despotism, it is their right, the right of the people, it is their duty to throw off such government and to provide new guards for their future security, such as has been the patient sufferance of these colonies, and such is now the necessity which constrains them to alter their former systems of government.

Here comes the indictment. The history of the present king of Great Britain is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having in direct object the establishment of absolute tyranny over these states.

[8:03] That's not too bad, is it? Okay, then they prove it by listing 27 examples of how the king of England has screwed it all up.

Alright? I'm not going to list all 27. I'm not going to list any of them. But, in the end, in every stage of these oppressions, we have petitioned for redress in the most humble terms.

We ask for help from the king to get this straightened out. Our repeated petitions have been answered only by repeated injury. The prince, whose character is thus marked by every act which may define a tyrant, is unfit to be a ruler of the free people.

So, here's the denouement. We, therefore, the representatives of the United States of America, in general Congress assembled, appealing to whom?

The supreme judge of the world. Who would that be? Yes. For the rectitude of our intentions, do in the name and by the authority of the good people of these colonies, solemnly publish and declare that these united colonies are and of right ought to be free and independent states, that they are absolved from all allegiance to the British crown, and that all political connection between them and the state of Great Britain is and ought to be totally dissolved.

[9:45] And for the support of this declaration, with firm reliance on the protection of divine providence, we mutually pledged to each other our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor.

Signed by every one of the 13 colonies, 56 people signed it, and the next eight years were filled with what? War.

War. This is a heritage we have adopted. Most of our families came to this country after that declaration was issued, but all of us benefit from it.

And you can see as they wrote their faith perspective. This was about God and a people. A people being free from an occupying power.

And they knew their Bible. In today's Bible Old Testament lesson, we learned about Abraham and Sarah. Do you think they took a risk? God said to them, Go that-a-way.

[10:56] That-a-way. They didn't know where that-a-way lived. But they took a risk and they went. As God directed them. And so with our founders.

They didn't know where that-a-way was. They just knew that they were representatives of the people, and they needed freedom. Same, same from the Bible.

We look at another aspect of the Bible. The people in bondage in Egypt. The people of Israel. They craved freedom.

They were under oppression. Now it's obvious reading it that not everybody of the people of Israel agreed with Moses on how to do it. I'm sure some said, Let's not leave.

Let's try to negotiate this a little bit more. Okay? But they went out. They all craved freedom. They took the risk.

[11:56] And so with our founders, the nation craved freedom. Now not everybody agreed with this Declaration of Independence. I can tell you that.

A lot of Anglicans did not want to depart Mother England. Some of them moved to Canada to get away from this whole thing. But the nation craved freedom, and so they went forward.

They took the risk. And we are all beneficiaries today. There's so much Jesus in this document. I think about how Jesus and the new Israel.

Jesus frees us not from Egypt, but from bondage of sin that corrupts us and oppresses us. He went to the cross to bring us freedom.

Now this was God in the flesh, of course, but he took a risk. Do you think it was easy? What he went through for us?

[13:03] He brought us freedom from sin and entrance into heaven. And so our nation's founders took a big risk in declaring independence.

What we don't see in the document is that they, by signing that document, set themselves up to be hanged for treason. And what happened is many of them lost their property by British governors. They lost their jobs. They lost everything, but they gained freedom. So, today, how do you and I step out?

How do we step out as Christian citizens of America? Well, number one, we stand for our founding document, the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution.

We hold it tightly as our managing document. We seek not to convert the Constitution into what's happening now.

[14:14] We take a deep interest in what our founding document stated. And number two, we vote our values. And we vote for men and women who advocate our values.

It is not wrong to try to visit our Christian values on the nation. Culture says we can't do it. That's a lot of baloney.

We are called to seek that these values continue in America today. And number three, we're actually to be proud of our accomplishments, which are many.

Be proud of our heritage as Americans and not be afraid to share their pride. Number four, we also need to be aware of mistakes we are making as a nation and to try to correct them.

That's a right thing to do for Christians. And then finally, we're called to proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior in this country and not be arrested for it.

[15:26] That is basic to our country. That's what we're called to be. So my question to you is, are you willing to take the risk of standing up for our nation?

Well, before that, are you willing to take the risk of accepting Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior? You see, we worship God. We honor our nation.

We don't worship our nation and honor God. We need to keep that clear as to how it fits. But for us, the fundamental thing is coming into a relationship with God.

Some time ago, I asked you to memorize Ephesians 2, 8, and 9. Some of you did that. For it is by grace we are saved, by faith.

It's a gift of God, not because of something we did. Lest anyone should boast. That is fundamental to Anglican Christians. It's who we are, saved by the grace of God through our faith given to us by God.

[16:36] You know, the heart of Jesus still beats in this nation today. We hear all bad news, but there's good news. I want to add, I want to end by mentioning three good news stories.

You know, you can go on, you can Google or use your search engine and put in there good news. There's an app that gives you the good news that's happened this week.

Who would have thought? Here are three good news stories. Let's start with Michelle and Zach. Michelle and Zach have time on their hands.

they're no longer caught in their house because of the pandemic and they thought, what's a good thing we can do? Well, has anybody ever walked part of the Appalachian Trail?

Yeah. In fact, our daughter, Laurel, has parted. Okay. The Appalachian Trail starts in Georgia and ends in Maine or in some people's minds, starts in Maine and ends in Georgia.

[17:40] It's a long haul. Well, Michelle and Zach decided that they were going to station themselves along the trail this year.

Starting in March, ending in September. They stop at various places along the trail. They set up tables and chairs. They give out KFC, hot dogs, protein bars, snacks, and they engage people in conversations.

Often about God. What a wonderful thing they're doing. That's a good news story. And they were quoted as saying, we've been blessed through the pandemic and we want to bless others.

Not bad. We moved to Maryland. A young man named John was driving across a bridge. It was over a gorge and there was an accident right in front of him.

And as the car smashed into the bridge, a little baby was thrown out into the gorge. What did John? John was afraid of heights.

[18:45] He could barely swim. He jumped out of the car, jumped into the gorge. Saved that baby. True story. Well, his comment, I'm just excited that God gave me the opportunity to save her.

Pretty humble. Well, so the Thunderbird aerial demonstration team was coming into town and they offered him a free ride in their two-seat F-16 to which he responded, I'm afraid of heights.

And then finally, a cook named Dante in Oklahoma, coming under hard times because he was being fired because of the pandemic, finally got a job at, I don't want to advertise a particular company, Buffalo Wild Wings.

The only problem was it was three hours away. He didn't have a car. So every day he walked to work three hours, walked home three hours, and there was another guy named Michael who drove that road.

And so he picked up Dante one day. And a friendship began. And pretty soon, Dante had a new bike.

[20:05] And it went faster than Raymond and Jack's bikes. It was It was Yep. And unbeknownst to Dante, Michael started a GoFundMe thing.

You know these GoFundMe things? Why do people give to GoFundMe? I don't know, \$52,000 later, Dante became a rich man. To this day, this was a couple of weeks back, Dante, a young black lad, and Michael, a young white lad, had become good friends.

Good news. And Dante said, it's all just a blessing from God. Good news happening. On this Independence Day, whether it be a religious holiday or not, who really cares, may we recognize its sacredness.

And may we be blessed that we might be a blessing. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.