**Looking at the Parts**

Unity Church July 6, 2025

Psalm 144:15b Psalm 145

On this 249th anniversary of the founding of our country, I’d like to spend some time looking at the little people, the truly unsung heroes who walked out this history and helped lay the foundations of what Jefferson called “this grand experiment.”

It’s not going to be 20 minutes of how our founding fathers were saints and walked on water, quite a few of them weren’t and didn’t. My two favorite founding fathers, Ben Franklin and Thomas Jefferson verged on being scoundrels. Both fathered children out of wedlock, and it is said that Franklin’s dalliances in France impressed even the French. Jefferson took a pair of scissors to the Holy Scriptures and physically did what a lot of people do mentally, removed anything that he didn’t agree with. Westminster College library has a copy of the Jefferson Bible. It’s significantly thinner than ours.

There is a pile of writings about the founding Fathers. There seems to be an industry around the argument of their spiritual backgrounds. Books have been written from both sides of the debate, which seems to get louder this time of year. Some wish to put them on par with Joan of Arc, some want to show them in their basest humanity. I get the feeling that they were both human and spiritual, not very different from us, a heart led by Christ, while walking on feet of clay.

It’s easy to believe that this group was unlike any other group of men that came together before or since those arguments in Independence Hall. They each seemed to have a unique set of gifts which complimented the group. I will readily subscribe to the notion that this “Grand Experiment” as Jefferson called it, was organized, overseen and blessed by our heavenly Father. There’s times I wonder if Franklin’s description of America after the Constitutional convention of, “A Republic, If we can keep it,” was a challenge or a curse.

But two things come to mind when reading the history of our founders: Winston Churchill’s statement, “History will be kind to me, for I intend to write it.” Secondly, a picture that a friend had hanging on his wall. He had served with Patton in WW2. The picture was of the General relieving himself off the side of a bridge. My friend said that every so often we need to remind ourselves that heroes are human too.

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But enough about the founders, I’d really like to look at those who were led, those who didn’t have a king’s ransom to give up for liberty, but just the same, risked everything for the dream of a better tomorrow. We tend to forget the little people, the common folks, the ones who lost toes and feet to frostbite while starving at Valley Forge. The blacksmiths, farmers, millers, weavers, gunpowder makers who went for years without being paid because this new government didn’t have a dime except what it could borrow, and had no way of raising taxes. It should also be pointed out that these weren’t all White Anglo Saxon Protestants: freedmen, Catholics and Jews also rallied to the cause.

In the same way that Jesus taught about the widow’s mite, these folks risked it all. Not only was the father of a family killed in battle, but quite frequently his two or three oldest sons. There are stories of husbands and wives manning cannon together. We don’t hear of the orphans and widows left by the Revolutionary War, but common sense says there had to be many. Keep in mind, this wasn’t the same as the enlistment parades of WW1 or 2, where people thought it was a glorious thing to make the world safe for democracy, this was life or death, a decision that under British Law was treason, punishable by hanging.

Let’s step back from these realities a moment and look at few considerations. Granted it is never wise for patriotism to take the place of spirituality, but there is a comparison here that needs made. All the folks that God called throughout the scriptures were flawed. Moses was a stammering murderer, Jacob a thief, David an adulterous murderer, Isaiah had a foul mouth, on through Judas, Peter, and Paul.

They, like us, were very human, confirming Paul’s writing in Romans 3:23, “For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.” We need to keep this in mind whenever we extoll the virtues of anyone, especially the heroes of our founding. But another thing that these people, called by God, had in common was that they were people of action, people whom you didn’t completely relax around. They accomplished things, right or wrong, thoughtfully or impulsively. They were doers, by and large, people with nerve.

Abraham either had courage or was out of his mind, to leave his home and go to what is now Israel. Likewise for Moses traveling back to Egypt to face his step father, Pharaoh. David, as a 12 year old boy, confronting Goliath. Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Jeremiah told to “Go and prophesy against this nation, they won’t listen and they’ll probably abuse you, if not try to kill you, but go anyway,” and they did. 2

Peter wasn’t mad at anyone, yet he left a promising career as a fishermen to follow Jesus for 3 1/2 years. Yes, you can say that the Spirit of the Lord was on these people, and you would be correct, but isn’t the spirit of the Lord on all of us?

Taking this idea from the scriptures to American history, these people, those folks who were led by the Founding Father’s who we celebrate each 4th of July weren’t shrinking violets either. Think about it, how many of us would pull up roots from Lackawanock Township and ship off to parts unknown, say Australia, South America, where ever? It’s interesting, we have been taught in history class that most of these people were persecuted in their home countries, either for religious reasons, nationality or boundaries moved because of war. Yet it was rarely the entire group that immigrated to the new world, it was never 100% of these persecuted groups. Often times it was closer to 25% than the whole.

During the potato famine of Ireland, one would think that anyone who could get on a boat would have come, but that’s not the case. The Amish and the rest of what is now called Pennsylvania Dutch, the same thing, yet I still have distant relatives in both Switzerland and France. Even the Puritans and Quakers in England, a very small minority of them actually fled the country.

We can ask, “Why?” and list the reasons people would choose the Devil they knew versus the Devil they didn’t, but I want to look at the ones who did pack family and kin onto a boat and came. For sake of this sermon, the ones who stayed behind don’t really matter.

The ones who came, for whatever reason, were self selected people of action. The ones who didn’t have courage, weren’t decisive, or spent their time looking for safety, didn’t come. One of the primary differences between the New World and the old, is that we are from self-selected, courageous, decisive stock.

My forebears who fled the Palatinate of Germany for the New World, lost over 10% of their group, either to disease or shipwreck. Most of them came as indentured servants, which was not uncommon among any group who arrived here. Regardless of whether you were Dutch, German, French or English, when you hit these shores, you were a subject of the Crown. A Crown that most people knew little about and to whom they felt no loyalty.

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After risking life and limb to get here, having served as indentured servants and finally earning a chance to build a life and family in this New World, the last thing they wanted to deal with was an occupying force of soldiers taxing anything they bought. The cry for independence rang true. It didn’t matter so much that it wasn’t their idea, it made sense. The Crown had done nothing to help them and their family in its’ struggle, why would they feel any loyalty to it? I would argue that this was another of many instances demonstrating that rugged self reliance.

This mindset readily embraced the notion of freedom, liberty. The average soldier of the Continental Army held no vision of a grand government that would replace the crown, they simply wanted the freedom to go after what ever opportunity they could. The Pursuit of Happiness was a vague notion that others would stay out of my business and let me build a future for my family.

These people, our forebears, were ruggedly self dependent, but most of them had a deep faith in God. They had seen enough of life and hardship, blessing and opportunity to realize, believe, that they moved in, were protected by the hand of God.

There’s an old saying that there are no atheists in foxholes. The trials and tribulations that most of these folks had seen or endured had a similar effect. They may have trusted their rifle and good aim, but they prayed to God each night for protection. They realized that it took more than a rifle to keep them safe. Unlike the old world, with faith dictated by the crown, they willingly chose to believe, to walk out their faith, and teach it to their children.

These ruggedly self reliant people, bowed to God but not much else. I would argue that the United States as founded in 1776, was a nation made up of Christians, as opposed to a Christian nation. One could argue that during the first 30 or so years of her history most of her citizens didn’t even look at her as a nation. She was by and large a loosely organized group of fiercely independent, self reliant individuals.

249 years later, God continues to bless us, the same way he blessed them. We need to follow their example in both their faith and self reliance. Now more than ever we need to pray for our country, we need to stand for what we believe and hold dear. We need to teach these beliefs to our children and their children.

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 Ben Franklin, at the 1787 Constitutional Convention, said: “I have lived, Sir, a long time and the longer I live, the more convincing proofs I see of this truth -- that 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? We have been assured, Sir, in the sacred writings that "except the Lord build they labor in vain that build it." I firmly believe this; and I also believe that without his concurring aid we shall succeed in this political building no better than the Builders of Babel: We shall be divided by our little partial local interests; our projects will be confounded, and we ourselves shall be become a reproach and a bye word down to future age.”

“And what is worse, mankind may hereafter this unfortunate instance, despair of establishing Governments by Human Wisdom, and leave it to chance, war, and conquest. I therefore beg leave to move -- that henceforth prayers imploring the assistance of Heaven, and its blessings on our deliberations, be held in this Assembly every morning before we proceed to business, and that one or more of the Clergy of this City be requested to officiate in that service.”

We should also be praying, daily, that our heavenly Father would continue to smile on and preserve this crazy quilt that we call a nation. As Ronald Reagan said, “We are the last bastion of freedom.”

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Psalm 144:15 RSV
Happy are the people whose God is the Lord!

Psalm 145 RSV

I will extol thee, my God and King, and bless thy name for ever and ever.

Every day I will bless thee, and praise thy name for ever and ever.

Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised, and his greatness is unsearchable.

One generation shall laud thy works to another, and shall declare thy mighty acts.

On the glorious splendor of thy majesty, and on thy wondrous works, I will meditate.

Men shall proclaim the might of thy terrible acts, and I will declare thy greatness.

They shall pour forth the fame of thy abundant goodness, and shall sing aloud of thy righteousness.

The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

The Lord is good to all, and his compassion is over all that he has made.

All thy works shall give thanks to thee, O Lord, and all thy saints shall bless thee!

They shall speak of the glory of thy kingdom, and tell of thy power,

to make known to the sons of men thy mighty deeds, and the glorious splendor of thy kingdom.

Thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and thy dominion endures throughout all generations.The Lord is faithful in all his words, and gracious in all his deeds. The Lord upholds all who are falling, and raises up all who are bowed down.

The eyes of all look to thee, and thou givest them their food in due season.

Thou openest thy hand, thou satisfiest the desire of every living thing.

The Lord is just in all his ways, and kind in all his doings.

The Lord is near to all who call upon him, to all who call upon him in truth.

He fulfils the desire of all who fear him, he also hears their cry, and saves them.

The Lord preserves all who love him; but all the wicked he will destroy.

My mouth will speak the praise of the Lord, and let all flesh bless his holy name for ever and ever.