

A SERMON BY
THE REVEREND WILLIAM R. FLEMING
MARINERS' CHURCH OF DETROIT

INDEPENDENCE DAY

(OBSERVED)

JULY 3, 2016



"GIVE ME YOUR TIRED, YOUR POOR, YOUR HUDDLED MASSES YEARNING TO BREATHE FREE, THE WRETCHED REFUSE OF YOUR TEEMING SHORE. SEND THESE, THE HOMELESS, TEMPEST-TOST TO ME, I LIFT MY LAMP BESIDE THE GOLDEN DOOR!"

TAKEN FROM EMMA LAZARUS'S INSCRIPTION ON THE STATUE OF LIBERTY

HEAR THESE WORDS FROM A VERY SPECIAL HYMN, "LORD GOD, WE WORSHIP THEE," AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP TO INDEPENDENCE DAY:

*LORD GOD WE WORSHIP THEE! FOR THOU OUR LAND DEFENDEST;
THOU POUREST DOWN THY GRACE, AND STRIFE AND WAR THOU ENDEST.
SINCE GOLDEN PEACE, O LORD, THOU GRANTEST US TO SEE,
OUR LAND WITH ONE ACCORD, LORD GOD, GIVES THANKS TO THEE!
LORD GOD WE WORSHIP THEE! AND PRAY THEE, WHO HAST BLEST US,
THAT WE MAY LIVE IN PEACE, AND NONE HENCE-FORTH MOLEST US:
O CROWN US WITH THY LOVE; FULFIL OUR CRY TO THEE:
O FATHER GRANT OUR PRAYER; LORD GOD, WE WORSHIP THEE!*

"O ETERNAL GOD THROUGH WHOSE MIGHTY POWER OUR FATHERS WON THEIR LIBERTIES OF OLD; GRANT, WE BESEECH THEE, THAT WE AND ALL THE PEOPLE OF THIS LAND MAY HAVE GRACE TO MAINTAIN THESE LIBERTIES IN RIGHTEOUSNESS AND PEACE; THROUGH JESUS CHRIST OUR LORD." AMEN.

WE ARE UPON A DAY OF CELEBRATION AND SACREDNESS AS WE OBSERVE INDEPENDENCE DAY 2016. WE WILL OBSERVE THE ACTUAL DAY TOMORROW. REGARDLESS OF HOW WE NOTED THAT DAY, WE BOW AGAIN TO THINK ABOUT THE INCREDIBLE MEANING OF JULY 4TH : THIS HISTORY, THIS COMMITMENT, THIS FREEDOM, WE HAVE BEEN GIVEN THE RESPONSIBILITY TO SUSTAIN THE IDEALS OF THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE.

ON 2 JULY 1776, THE CONTINENTAL CONGRESS, COMPRISED OF DELEGATES SENT BY THE LEGISLATURES OF THE THIRTEEN COLONIES, VOTED TO DECLARE COMPLETE INDEPENDENCE FROM BRITISH RULE, AND ON JULY 4TH THE FORMAL WORDING OF THE DECLARATION (PRINCIPALLY THE WORK OF THOMAS JEFFERSON) WAS APPROVED AND THE DOCUMENT SIGNED.

LET US BRIEFLY SHARE JEFFERSON'S THOUGHTS ON FREEDOM:

1. FREEDOM FROM THE INFLUENCE, CONTROL OR COMPLETE DEPENDENCE ON OTHERS.
2. FREEDOM OR RELEASE FROM SLAVERY, IMPRISONMENT, CAPTIVITY, OR ANY OTHER FORM OF ARBITRARY CONTROL.

“BACK OF EVERY GREAT CIVILIZATION, BEHIND ALL THE POWER AND WEALTH, IS SOMETHING AS POWERFUL. A SET OF IDEAS, ATTITUDES, CONVICTIONS, AND THE CONFIDENCE THAT THOSE IDEAS AND CONVICTIONS ARE VIABLE. NO NATION CAN ACHIEVE GREATNESS UNLESS IT BELIEVES IN SOMETHING — AND UNLESS THAT SOMETHING HAS THE MORAL DIMENSIONS TO SUSTAIN A GREAT CIVILIZATION.”

STATESMAN JOHN W. GARDNER, NO EASY VICTORS

WITH GARDNER'S FIRM THOUGHTS ABOUT SUSTAINING A GREAT CIVILIZATION, LET US DELVE INTO THE CORE OF INDEPENDENCE HISTORY.

- AFTER THE FRENCH AND INDIAN WAR, ENDED IN 1763, RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN THE COLONIES AND GREAT BRITAIN SOURED.
- THE COLONIES WERE FURTHER ANGERED WHEN KING GEORGE III WANTED THE COLONISTS TO PAY FOR THE BRITISH DEFENSES.
- MANY AMERICANS OBJECTED.
- GREAT BRITAIN SENT TROOPS TO KEEP ORDER BUT LARGE CLASHES ERUPTED.
- THE BRITISH AUTHORIZED THE CLOSING OF BOSTON HARBOR AND PROHIBITED ALL TOWN MEETINGS WITHOUT THE GOVERNOR'S CONSENT.
- ON SEPTEMBER 5TH, 1774, THE FIRST CONTINENTAL CONGRESS CONDEMNED THE ACTS, DENOUNCED THE TAXES AND ADOPTED A DECLARATION OF RIGHTS, LIFE, LIBERTY AND PROPERTY.
- RICHARD HENRY LEE, A DELEGATE FROM VIRGINIA. BROUGHT THE QUESTION OF INDEPENDENCE BEFORE THE SECOND CONTINENTAL CONGRESS. WITH JOHN ADAMS' SUPPORT, LEE RESOLVED THAT THESE COLONIES ARE (AND OF RIGHT) TO BE FREE AND INDEPENDENT STATES; THAT THEY ARE ABSOLVED FROM ALL ALLEGIANCES TO THE BRITISH CROWN.
- THE NEXT MONTH FOMENTED MUCH DISCUSSION AND STIRRED UP GREAT ANGER.
- ON JULY 2ND, 1776, CONGRESS VOTED FOR LEE'S VERSION OF THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE. THE FINAL VERSION WAS RATIFIED ON JULY 4TH, 1776.
- JEFFERSON, ONE OF THE YOUNGEST AND MOST ELOQUENT SPEAKERS AND WRITERS, WROTE A PREAMBLE TO THE DOCUMENT ITSELF.
- THE PEOPLE OF PHILADELPHIA WERE THE FIRST TO HEAR THE DECLARATION.
- A NAME WHICH HAS BEEN LOST IN HISTORY SUGGESTED THAT JULY 4, 1777 AND THEREAFTER SHOULD BE CELEBRATED AND SO IT WAS — AND IS.

SPECIAL NOTE: JOHN ADAMS WROTE A MAGNIFICENT LETTER TO HIS WIFE ABIGAIL ADAMS:

"I AM WELL AWARE OF THE TOIL, AND BLOOD, AND TREASURE, THAT IT WILL COST US TO MAINTAIN THIS DECLARATION, AND SUPPORT AND DEFEND THESE

STATES. YET THROUGH ALL THE GLOOM, I CAN SEE THE RAYS OF RAVISHING LIGHT AND GLORY . . . THE FOURTH DAY OF JULY, 1776, WILL BE THE MOST MEMORABLE EPOCH IN THE HISTORY OF AMERICA. I AM APT TO BELIEVE THAT IT WILL BE CELEBRATED BY SUCCEEDING GENERATIONS AS THE GREAT ANNIVERSARY FESTIVAL. IT OUGHT TO BE COMMEMORATED AS THE DAY OF DELIVERANCE, BY SOLEMN ACTS OF DEVOTION TO GOD ALMIGHTY. IT OUGHT TO BE SOLEMNIZED WITH POMP AND PARADE, WITH SHOWS, GAMES, SPORTS, BELLS, AND BONFIRES; FROM ONE END OF THIS CONTINENT TO THE OTHER, FROM THIS TIME FORWARD FOREVERMORE.”

JOHN ADAMS, LETTER TO ABIGAIL ADAMS, 3 JULY 1776

PETER MARSHALL BROUGHT THE SPIRIT AND LOVE OF GOD FOR THOSE WHO CELEBRATE THIS OCCURENCE ANNUALLY. HIS STATEMENT “GOD WAS RECOGNIZED AS THE SOURCE OF HUMAN RIGHTS,” WAS INCORPORATED IN THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE. UNDER GOD, THE FOUNDING FATHERS SOUGHT CERTAIN THINGS THAT RING THROUGH HISTORY, THEY SOUGHT FREEDOM.

- NOT FROM LAW, BUT FREEDOM IN LAW.
- NOT FREEDOM FROM GOVERNMENT, BUT FREEDOM IN GOVERNMENT.
- NOT FREEDOM FROM SPEECH BUT FREEDOM IN SPEECH.
- NOT FREEDOM FROM THE PRESS, BUT FREEDOM IN THE PRESS.
- NOT FREEDOM FROM RELIGION BUT FREEDOM IN RELIGION.
- IN OUR FAITH IN GOD AND IN OUR COUNTRY WE MUST PONDER AND SEEK TO LIVE THE HEART OF THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE.
- WE REMEMBER THAT ALL PEOPLE ARE CREATED EQUAL.
- WE ARE FREE TO IGNORE THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE BUT OUR FAITH IN GOD PULLS US TO EMBRACE.
- IN GOD WE TRUST.
- 300,000 AMERICANS, MEN AND WOMEN, DID NOT DIE IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR TO ALLOW OUR COUNTRY TO LOSE OUR FREEDOM.

WE, THEREFORE, THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, IN GENERAL CONGRESS, AND TOGETHER ASSEMBLED, APPEALING TO THE SUPREME JUDGE OF THE WORLD 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; AND THAT AS FREE AND INDEPENDENT STATES, THEY HAVE FULL POWER TO LEVY WAR, CONCLUDE PEACE CONTRACT ALLIANCES, ESTABLISH COMMERCE, AND TO DO ALL OTHER ACTS AND THINGS WHICH INDEPENDENT STATES MAY OF RIGHT DO. AND FOR THE SUPPORT OF THIS DECLARATION, WITH A FIRM RELIANCE ON THE PROTECTION OF DIVINE PROVIDENCE, WE MUTUALLY PLEDGE TO EACH OTHER OUR LIVES, OUR FORTUNES, AND OUR SACRED HONOR.

LORD GOD ALMIGHTY, IN WHOSE NAME THE FOUNDERS OF THIS COUNTRY WON LIBERTY FOR THEMSELVES AND FOR US, AND LIT THE TORCH OF FREEDOM FOR NATIONS THEN UNBORN: GRANT THAT WE AND ALL THE PEOPLE OF THIS LAND MAY HAVE GRACE TO MAINTAIN OUR LIBERTIES IN RIGHTEOUSNESS AND PEACE; THROUGH JESUS CHRIST OUR LORD, WHO LIVES AND REIGNS WITH YOU AND THE HOLY SPIRIT, ONE GOD, FOR EVER AND EVER. AMEN