

In God We Still Trust

Just Sayin'! January 11, 2023

~ Lanny K. Cook©



Have you ever had the opportunity to visit a national cemetery? I've visited numerous ones, including the National Cemetery in Normandy, France and of course, Arlington in Virginia. Personally, there is a sacred awareness that accompanies a visit to a national burial site. It really is like walking on holy ground. I believe part of the sanctity of visiting such a place involves the realization that so many of the remains buried there gave their lives for *freedom's call*. At the very least, they devoted years of their lives to the advancement of this cause. Being buried with honors in a national cemetery is a tribute to the sacrifice and price required for Liberty.

I have been deeply honored to officiate numerous burials at Fort Logan National Cemetery in Denver, Colorado. I must say I have been deeply humbled each time I was allowed to stand by the casket of a beloved veteran and provide words of comfort and hope to the family. As the fallen is honored with a 21 Gun Salute and the lone bugler plays a somber rendition of Taps, I can't help but experience waves of tears welling up in my eyes and trickling down my cheeks.

There are over 160 national cemeteries throughout the U.S. and its territories. Every national cemetery is a tribute to the sacrifice of blood, sweat and tears from a grateful nation. Arlington National Cemetery is probably one of the most famous sites. The solemn reality of Arlington is that it entombs veterans from every major war that America has ever fought. Eleven veterans from the Revolutionary War are buried there as they were reinterred at the site after Arlington was established in 1876. There are even 14 veterans from the Spanish American War who were reinterred at Arlington. Making it the earthly resting place to veterans from nearly every war this country has ever engaged.

In most national cemeteries at the top of each white-marble headstone is an inscription depicting the religious faith of the fallen. The Cross and the Star of David are the most common symbol. In Normandy, the headstones are actually either white-marble crosses or a pillar adorned with the Star of David. Of course, it makes sense that these are the predominant symbols of a veteran's faith as America was founded upon Judeo/Christian principles. Is it no wonder that one of the driving forces behind America's defense of personal freedom stems from the inalienable right to freely worship God Almighty? Religious freedom is the capstone of all freedoms bestowed upon a citizen of the United States of America. It is also the cornerstone on which all personal freedoms are founded. America's version of freedom was intentionally designed to be different than that of any other culture in the thousands of years of human governance. It grew out of the God-given right for independence and the desire to worship God freely and without government interference or controlling mandates; Such as demanding adherence to an appointed religion of the state.

The quest for independence started hundreds of years before the Revolutionary war as the immigrants to the New World, before even setting foot on the shores of Virginia, wrote a document entitled the “Mayflower Compact.” This Compact was actually the forerunner to the Declaration of Independence and served as an official covenant agreement. A covenant that the Pilgrims all pledged to follow! It was a promise to each other and to God. They declared an individual willingness to commit all that they had and all that they were to collectively pursue and persevere the challenge of colonizing this new world and in the process bring glory God.

“Having undertaken, for the glory of God and advancement of the Christian faith, a voyage to plant the first colony in the northern parts of Virginia, do by these presents solemnly and mutually in the presence of God and one of another, covenant and combine ourselves together into a civil body politic, for our better ordering and preservation and furtherance of the ends aforesaid, and by virtue hereof to enact, constitute and frame such just and equal laws, ordinances, acts, constitutions and offices from time to time for the general good of the colony!”

Of all the adventurers who came to this country, the Pilgrims were the only ones to survive in this wild and ruthless land! The stark reality of their venture encompassed the fact that many of them never made it through the first winter. Literally, they offered up their lives to this shared cause of freedom. I believe that there was a profound explanation to their collective survival even though more than half of their party perished within the first year of landing on America’s shore. They endured because they made a covenant with God and to each other. It was their faith and their prayerful dependence on Him that perpetuated their survival.

It was the Mayflower Compact that created a standard, outlining the ingenious framework for a free and equal people. A group who had voluntarily made a covenant to create a new civil government and order. It truly was a civil body politic based on Christian principles and values! The first of its kind. But it took another 150 years for this country to declare its Independence and then gain their freedom from England! And even more significant, it took years of sacrifice and blood shed for the colonists to win the Revolutionary War. The founding Fathers of the United States believed that it was through God’s Divine Providence that this country was to become an independent nation, governed by the people as a democratic republic. The kind that allowed every individual the personal freedom to live and worship any way they would individually choose!

Both Christopher Columbus, and the Pilgrims believed God had destined this New World to be a Light to the Nations? A city set upon a hill? They believed that this country was ordained by God to serve a divine purpose! Thus, it was founded on the principles of the Judeo/Christian faith! It was their faith and their belief in this Divine calling that gave the colonists the courage and determination to fight and die for their pursuit and legacy of liberty! This means that our country was founded by people of faith! It was only through unwavering faith and constant prayer that the founding fathers and mothers were able to persevere through the personal challenges and battles, associated with this divine purpose and destiny!

In II Chronicles 7:14 God tells us, “If My people, which are called by My name, shall humble themselves and pray, and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways; then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land!”

The way things are going today, maybe the country should take some time to think about that verse! As a nation we have a tendency to turn to God whenever we have a crisis! Look at 911. Nearly everyone in the U.S. began to pray to a higher power! Throughout our history this country has consistently turned away from God as things became too comfortable. That is until we are humbled to the point of hopelessness, realizing there is no other viable avenue than to fall on our knees to pray. As the stark reality of life’s challenge hits, it is usually only then that we begin crying out for deliverance from the clutches of tragic circumstance!

Recently, we saw the country desperately turn to God on national television, as the Buffalo Bill’s Damar Hamlin suffered a tragic episode and had to be resuscitated in front of millions of football fans. After Damar collapsed and lay motionless on the field the emergency workers rushed to his side. The whole stadium stopped to watch in stunned silence, not sure of what was actually unfolding right before their very eyes. And then? The players and coaches gathered together on the field to kneel and pray, as the whole world held their breath to mutter a desperate, solemn prayer. Even the broadcast booth paused in horror before the sport’s analyst Dan Orlovsky openly prayed to God Almighty over the televised airway. The country watched a true miracle in the making as the emergency responders finally got his heart to start beating once again before carting him off the field by ambulance. I believe that the world has never before witnessed such a profound, miraculous answer to prayer. Fortunately, it was a positive answer to the nation’s prayers as Damar was brought back from the brink of death and continues his recovery. This nationally televised incident serves as a stark reminder to the importance of both individual and collective prayer.

This nation was founded on the faith and the prayers of its founders. America can continue to serve as a light upon the hill if we choose to lift our eyes and hearts in prayer. That light is freedom! It is a freedom intricately woven throughout the tapestry of civil liberty!

George Washington the Father of our great country said this, *“The liberty enjoyed by the people of these states of worshipping Almighty God, is not only among the choicest of their blessings, but also of their rights.*”

Thomas Jefferson the third president of these United States and the principle author of the Declaration of Independence is quoted as saying, *“God who gave us life, gave us liberty... I pray to God that these principles may be eternal!”*

And, according to President Woodrow Wilson, *“America was born a Christian Nation... and was born to exemplify that devotion. America is privileged to shed her blood and her might for the principles that gave her birth.... And God helping her, she can do no other!”*

This past summer, I had the privilege of visiting one of the most prominent national cemeteries in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. The experience was profound as I witnessed the profound sacrifice of a nation to advance the cause of freedom, cast from the furnace of

equality. Personally, I believe the most inspirational words of American sacrifice were shared by Abraham Lincoln, when he gave his infamous Gettysburg Address!

“We have come to dedicate a portion of this field as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that this nation might live. The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but can never forget what they did here. It is for the living rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought have thus far nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us – that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain – that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth!”

Things have most certainly changed from the earlier history of this country. The world's a lot different and so is America! Many of those changes have been toward a greater cause and the collective good of the nation. Others? Well, not so much! The current climate of our country has become more divisive, and polarized. Differences have become the focus and the common good that we share with one another is often the focus of attack and ridicule. But yet, we still have hope. We can still maintain our faith, because God hasn't changed and neither has His Word! God's promise is as relevant today as it was when our founding fathers and mothers built this great nation through their reliance on Him. We too need to continually seek God's wisdom and guidance to perpetuate the legacy of a Divine calling! Our calling as a Judeo/Christian America is to continue to be a light upon a hill. We are called to be a light unto the nations! It comes through faith in God and committed prayer to the Creator of all things! After all, we are heirs to that first revolution!

John F. Kennedy in his Inaugural Address said it best; *“The world is very different now, for man holds in his mortal hands the power to abolish all forms of human poverty and all forms of human life. And yet the same revolutionary beliefs for which our forebears fought are still at issue around the globe – The belief that the rights of man come not from the generosity of the state but from the hand of God. We dare not forget today that we are heirs of that first revolution. Let the word go forth from this time and place, to friend and foe alike, that the torch has been passed to a new generation of Americans – born in this century, tempered by war, disciplined by a hard and bitter peace, proud of our ancient heritage and unwilling to witness or permit the slow undoing of those human rights to which this nation has always been committed, and to which we are committed today at home and around the world. Let every nation know, whether it wishes us well or ill, that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend and oppose any foe to assure the survival and the success of liberty...*

...And so, my fellow Americans: ask not what your country can do for you--ask what you can do for your country. My fellow citizens of the world: ask not what America will do for you, but what together we can do for the freedom of man. Finally, whether you are citizens of America or citizens of the world, ask of us here the same high standards of strength and sacrifice which we ask of you. With a good conscience our only sure reward, with history the final judge of our deeds, let us go forth to lead the land we love, asking His blessing and His help, but knowing that here on earth God's work must truly be our own.”

As American's we are called to collectively, without division or malice, lift up the torch of freedom and continue to carry it as a light to the world! We must persevere. Ronald Reagan the fortieth president of the United States had this to say about Freedom:

“Freedom is never more than one generation away from extinction. We didn't pass it to our children in the bloodstream. It must be fought for, protected, and handed on for them to do the same.”

Within that same mind set, he also shared this profound observation:

“If we lose freedom here, there is no place to escape to. This is the last stand on earth.”

It's time as individuals and as a nation, to get back to our roots, recognizing that God is the One who provides both life, and liberty. It is my prayer, just as it was the prayer of Thomas Jefferson, that these principles may be eternal.

We must once again, come together as a nation in order to recognize that we truly are One Nation - under God. Freedom is dependent upon never letting go of these self-evident truths - that all men are created equal - that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness!” Freedom is also dependent on maintaining a vigilant commitment to give your all toward the advancement of these truths! May the Chime of Freedom continue to ring throughout every corner of this great Land - God bless America!

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