

## Following the Trail of Freedom

My wife and I have had a momentous week. We have walked where the founders of our country have walked and just being in these places has been a moving experience. As I write these words, I am still basking in the wonder of being an American. In truth, there has never been a country quite like the United States of America. This is the year we elect our president and I am reminded again of our inestimable freedoms. As we have re-traced the route of those patriots and as we face the condition of our nation now more than ever I find myself praying the words of President Lincoln on that day of destiny on the Battlefield of Gettysburg: "...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."

Come with me for a few minutes and walk with me to:

### **1. The Cradle of Freedom: Independence Hall**

As we walked on the floors our forefathers walked and were surrounded by the same walls that surrounded our forefathers we realized this was the birthing center of our country. This was where the Declaration of Independence was signed in 1776 and the Constitution was signed in 1787. Just a few steps away from this room is where the House of Representatives and the Senate met for the first time and nearby is where the Supreme Court of the United States convened for the first time. This is where George Washington took his oath of office for the second term and where John Adams took his oath of office as well. It was the seat of this budding Republic.

Although some of the furniture is a facsimile and some they think may have been used in those days, there was one chair that stood out. The curators are certain of this chair's history. George Washington used this chair for nearly three months of the Federal Convention's continuous sessions. James Madison reported Benjamin Franklin saying, "I have often looked at that behind the president without being able to tell whether it was rising or setting. But now I know that it is a rising sun." I suggest the reason this became a rising rather than setting sun is disclosed in the motion of prayer made by Franklin during that Constitutional framing convention: "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 the house they labour in vain that build it.... 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.”

May our prayer be, “Oh God, may our sun rise again for freedom under God for all. May we return as a nation to exalting You and not leaving you out as many of our confused leaders have done in recent days.” *“Wilt thou not revive us again: that thy people may rejoice in thee?”* (Psalm 85:6).

## **2. The Crucible of Freedom: Valley Forge**

We were deeply moved as we drove the ten mile circumference of Valley Forge. There Washington and his men entrenched themselves on the high ground between Philadelphia and York, the fugitive home of the seat of our government. General Washington had suffered a bitter defeat at the Battle of Brandywine, the British had captured Philadelphia and the threat of the British finding some signers of the Declaration and leadership of this young country and hanging them all was real. During this winter of 1777 and 1778, the Continental army stood guard to protect this embryonic Republic. They started out with about fourteen thousand; by winter's end seven thousand were left. A mutiny was narrowly diverted and by the spring the total had risen back to twenty thousand. But it was during the winter that the faithful in the Continental Army passed their greatest test.

Toward the end of this encampment Washington said of this “Crucible of Victory,” “To see men without clothes to cover their nakedness, without blankets to lie upon, without shoes...without a house or hut to cover them until those could be built, and submitting without a murmur, is a proof of patience and obedience which, in my opinion, can scarcely be paralleled.” -April 21,1778.

In reflection I find myself praying a portion of the words of Lincoln’s second inaugural address, just days before he was assassinated, “Lord help us to hold to eternal truth ‘with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right’....” I was impressed with the different paintings of Washington kneeling in different settings of Valley Forge. It was reported that one young man returned home for a visit after this crucible and said to his mother, “Mother, I know we’re going to win this here war against the British!” His mother asked, “How do you know that son?” He replied, “Because I’ve seen General Washington kneeling in the snow.” *“...The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much”* (James 5:16).

## **3. The Church of Freedom: Christ Church**

One of our inspirations for our own church's name came from this historic church founded in 1695 and called America’s Church, Christ Church of Philadelphia. It was where George Washington was a congregant and Benjamin Franklin attended along with fifteen other signers of the Declaration of Independence. One of the secretaries told us that many, if not most, of the attendees now were visitors to see the church where victory for independence was prayed for and obtained. I found myself in prayer that God would help churches to shake off the mothballs of modernism and be renewed with that same fervor that shook colonial America to her core under the preaching of Jonathan

Edwards, George Whitefield and John Wesley. May we claim God's promise, "And I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten..." (Joel 2:25).

#### **4. The Call of Freedom: Fort McHenry**

Mrs. Pope and I stood on that sacred ground where Francis Scott Key was inspired to write the words of the National Anthem. We arrived at the perfect time. After touring the grounds and just as they were closing for the evening, one of the park rangers asked if we would like to help fold and raise the colors. What an honor! In touching symbolism, we brought down and folded the flag from the exact spot where the first star spangled banner flew, in 1814, with fifteen stars and fifteen stripes. We carefully and reverently folded that flag and then we raised up the present day flag, with fifty stars and thirteen stripes. As we saw her lifted in the setting sun at Fort McHenry I find myself in reflection praying the words of the last stanza of this anthem,

Oh! thus be it ever, when freemen shall stand  
Between their loved home and the war's desolation!  
Blest with victory and peace, may the heav'n rescued land  
Praise the Power that hath made and preserved us a nation.  
Then conquer we must, when our cause it is just,  
And this be our motto: "In God is our trust."  
And the star-spangled banner in triumph shall wave  
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave!

Let these words serve as a clarion call to come back to God! Woven in the warp and woof of our land is the indelible imprint of God's fingerprints. He has blessed us! May He give us a heart to return to Him again! "*Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD; and the people whom he hath chosen for his own inheritance*" (Psalm 33:12).

-Pastor Pope-

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