

## *A Word from the Pastor*

Dear Tis of Thee Saints,

On July 4<sup>th</sup> of 1831, the national hymn “America” was sang in public for the first time at a children’s Independence Day celebration at Park Street Church in Boston, Massachusetts. Lowell Mason had asked Samuel Francis Smith to write lyrics and or translate lyrics for several German songs in his possession. One of these was the song that would become “America”, perhaps better known as My Country tis of Thee. The tune had been and still is used as the national anthem of the United Kingdom, “God Save the King”. Smith intentionally wrote the lyrics to change the tenor from that of fealty to a monarch to a song extolling the virtues of a democracy.

Up until the adoption of The Star Bangled Banner as the National Anthem in 1931, “America” and “Hail Columbia” were often played as de facto national anthems. “America” has been sung at inaugurations by the likes of Aretha Franklin and Kelly Clarkson. Martin Luther King closed his I Have a Dream Speech with the first verse of the song. Perhaps the greatest performance of this song was by Marion Anderson in 1939 on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial. This was after the DAR refused to let an African American sing it at their meeting. Eleanor Roosevelt intervened and set up the performance which garnered 70,000 attendees and millions of radio listeners. Indeed, her singing of this song made a statement about my country being God-given for all.

As we celebrate our nations birth on the Fourth of July, may we reflect on the words “tis of Thee”. Indeed, our nation was intended to be a haven for those seeking liberty and justice for all without intervention from a capricious monarch or dictator: sweet land of liberty.

Some might argue in this day and age that the time for invoking God in a religious sense in relation to our nation has passed. I would argue, however, that if you read the lyrics, you will find words that instill a sense of universal hope and foundation-building pride in all Americans. It is this song more than any other that brings aa tear to my eye when I hear it.

In Ezra 3:10-11 we read the following: “Now when the builders had laid the foundation of the temple of the Lord, the priests stood in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites the sons of Asaph, with cymbals, to praise the Lord according to the directions of King David of Israel. They sang, praising and giving thanks to the Lord, saying, ‘For He is good, for His lovingkindness is upon Israel forever.’ And all the people shouted with a great shout when they praised the Lord because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid.” This passage references the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem following the return from Babylon of the Hebrew people. Other verses speak of tears of those old enough to remember the first temple, hopes of those who had heard stories of the glory of Israel under David and Solomon. Their work was made possible by God and they rightfully praised God for all that they had accomplished.

On July 4<sup>th</sup> as you eat that second hot dog, I hope you will pause and give thanks to God for our temple, our country, which is an ongoing work in progress. The liberty and freedom for ALL we proclaim is yet to be completely fulfilled. But as we hear the strains of “America” from a far off Independence day celebration being sung by a group of fresh faced elementary kids, I hope those tears welling up in your eyes are the result of your hopes and dreams for a nation which follows the hope of love of neighbor put forth by our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Grace and Peace,  
Pastor Dennis

“Information taken from Wikipedia”