

# *“Lessons from a Forgotten Revolution”*

Genesis 50: 24-26

Rev. Dr. Don Stannard

Hudson United Methodist Church

12 November 2023

Last Sunday was “All Saints Day” and yesterday was “Veterans Day”. These represent two days that are powerful reminders of the influences that our ancestors have had on our faith and freedoms.

I have been preaching for the past 63 years. Today may be my last sermon. Therefore I ask you to listen carefully. This will be the most personal sermon I have ever preached.

For several months our worship experiences have included so-called “Breakthrough Moments”.

In this sermon, I will attempt to share breakthrough events that highlight my love for our country, our ancestors, our freedoms, and our opportunities.

In the last few verses in the book of Genesis, we learn the final death wish of Joseph. He tells his brothers that he is soon to die. He instructs them to take his bones to the land that God promised to their ancestors, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He wants to be with his people in life and death.

## **Part 1**

In March our daughter, Ellen, received a letter from the chairman of the Westbrook Connecticut Historical Society. It was an invitation to attend the dedication of the gravestone of Peter Stannard, who died in 1778. I am the eighth direct descendant of Peter. Peter and his son, Peter Jr. both fought in the Revolutionary War.

Peter was discharged after two years because he contracted smallpox. He was buried on his farm along with three of his six children because in town burials were not permitted.

I informed Ellen that I wouldn't be going to the event because I'd already been there five times in the past. One of those occasions was a Sunday worship service when seventeen Stannards had gathered for a family reunion. It is just getting too hard to travel was my excuse. Then about two weeks before the dedication our son, Mark, called with the command, “Dad, you and Mother are going to Connecticut.” (No, would you like to go?) It was 3 votes to 2. Therefore the five of us went to the June 2<sup>nd</sup> event and I had the privilege of being the main speaker.

I've had the responsibility to care for the old Stannard Bible which has been passed down through the generations to whoever had the name of Gilbert Stannard. Gilbert is my middle name.

Because we have no other Gilberts now I have given the Bible to the Historical Society for their records.

Peter's gravestone had been knocked over face down about 220 years ago. Therefore the inscription's lettering has had little damage from acid rain.

Just a hundred yards off a cul-de-sac featuring multi-million dollar homes is a woodland path leading to Peter's grave.

The Historical Society raised \$20,000 to cover the cost of an eight-foot steel fence. The enclosure is approximately twelve-foot square to guarantee no bulldozer destroys the grave site. The Society also purchased the eighty acres of woods that contains the gravesite.

This dedication service for Peter was held on June 2, 2023. This is 245 years after his death. Even a Fife and Drum Corp dressed in Revolutionary military garb was present to play rousing tunes. All the local dignitaries and the Congregational minister spoke.

Have you been finding your roots? Their lives are our inheritance. Not an inheritance in terms of dollars but in terms of Christian faith, freedom, and family.

There were endless questions I would like to ask Peter. Why did you pick this land for a farm? What crops did you plant? Were you aware that three of your children died of smallpox? How did you cope with the knowledge that your son, Peter Jr. was a captive of the British?

Thank you for the sacrifice you made to help our country win its freedoms that I and others enjoy today.

## **Part 2**

An advantage of being a retired 87-year-old is that I can take a nap or watch T.V. whenever I feel like it.

In about 1984 our family traveled to Washington D.C. It was our three-day trip to see everything. On our last evening in the motel, Ann asked each of us what we liked the best. Ellen shared that she liked the Smithsonian Institute, and Mark said the Lincoln Memorial. The youngest, Ben, said he liked the bench in front of the Ford Theater where Lincoln was shot. I asked why? Ben said, "Because you let me sit down and you bought me a coke." For me, the Senate Chamber was special because the tour guide went to great lengths to tell us when we went into the Senate Chamber to watch the proceedings we were not to talk not even a whisper. He said, "after fifteen minutes,

I'll lead you out." We listened to a speech by Senator Jesse Helms of North Carolina.

Then it was on January 6, 2021, that I watched T.V. in horror the march on the Capital. Do not try to tell me it was a peaceful event. I watched it all. It pained me, it cost me sleep. How could

anyone do those things? It was complete anarchy. The election was not stolen. There are no alternative facts, only facts. It still grieves me to know and see that some folks have such hatred for our country.

Hats off to the community of Westbrook who found a way to show their appreciation for Peter. A farmer who at age 40 fought in more than a few battles to help a young country win its freedom.

We are all privileged and blessed to live in the USA with freedoms that few others in the world enjoy. Do not forget how fortunate you are because of the efforts of our ancestors.

There are those who speak loudly today about freedom and then encourage book banning, and are against teaching black history in our schools, and how our country was built on the backs of black slaves and the list of denied freedoms goes on and on.

### **Part 3**

After the dedication, the five of our Stannards went out to dinner at a fancy restaurant.

At the end of the meal, while enjoying my crème burlee, a fact hit me, out of the blue. It was a “Breakthrough Moment.”

This was the first time in thirty-five years that just the five of our Stannard family, Ellen, Mark, Ben, Ann, and I were sitting, eating, and enjoying ourselves as a family around the same table.

Over the years I have shared many holidays and birthdays together with other family members and friends. This special meal was the result of the contributions of our 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> ancestor Peter of 245 years ago. His power and life brought us together as a family.

May you too grow in ever-deepening appreciation of your ancestors and our country with its hard-won freedoms.