

A Few Thoughts for the Hunkered-Down

Tuesday, July 21, 2020

An Anthem Worth Singing

*O say, does that Star-Spangled Banner yet wave,
o'er the land of the free, and the home of the brave?*
—The Star-Spangled Banner

*For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight
of glory beyond all measure. —2 Corinthians 4:17*

In this patriotic month, as the fireworks are just beginning to subside in my neighborhood, I occasionally pause and consider again our National Anthem. “The Star-Spangled Banner” has long been surrounded by debate, and the objections to the anthem have been wide and varied. Most recently we are hearing the anthem being decried as its author owned slaves. Whether this latest challenge gains any steam remains to be seen. I do know that after hearing many discussions and having given it much thought myself, I have come to love the anthem, as both a national song and as a wise word of faith.

Over my lifetime I heard plenty of reasons to not like “The Star-Spangled Banner.” I recall learning it as a child in school. Upon hearing the story of the bombardment of Fort McHenry I was a bit perplexed that our national song celebrated a battle that we didn’t really win—we just kept ourselves from losing! This seemed a pale reason for much celebration, let alone a national anthem! Growing up through the 60s and 70s I found myself in an era when patriotism was not much in style, and many of my classmates would roll their eyes and sigh when they had to yet again endure the song.

Some objected to the anthem as being unsingable, and that was hard to deny. I shall ever be amazed that an easier tune couldn’t be found for Mr. Key’s lyric. A little study of history also made me marvel at the horrible mess that our country was in during the War of 1812 when the anthem was penned. Many will point to Jackson’s victory at New Orleans and claim that we won that war, and some will call the war a draw, but I stand firm that any war in which our capital is burned by the enemy can only qualify as a terrible defeat. Why sing of such a miserable war, especially when a lovely song like “America the Beautiful” seems to have “The Star-Spangled Banner” beat by a country mile? Ours seemed to be an odd anthem.

Then came 9-11. Without warning our nation took a terrible, humiliating and horrifying beating. It was in those days that I was reminded of what it meant to be an

American, valuing liberty, in stark contrast to the sick ideologies of the radicals who attacked us. That was a horrible day, but it was a day when freedom endured. Bin Laden spoke of anticipating a coup, and the American people rising up, and his remarks betrayed his complete misunderstanding of our nation. By day's end we believed in liberty more than ever and trusted that this vision of a free land would endure. The flag still waved, "o'er the land of the free, and the home of the brave."

Our National Anthem is a testimony to perseverance, through dark days and a sad era. It is about living to fight another day. It is about not being conquered, nor losing our love of freedom. It is a wonderful song. If our national song had been inspired by a great day of conquest, that would have been a tragedy of the highest order, for we just might come to think of our nation's greatness as being its military superiority or ability to win.

The National Anthem is truly a song for our nation and a word of encouragement for hard times like these. We often speak of our Declaration and Constitution as inspired by biblical truths. Perseverance is a divine virtue which our anthem adds to those insights. So, I stand and sing, struggling with the high notes but ever encouraged by this word of resilience and enduring belief in liberty. You are welcome to join me.

Blessings,

Pastor Jim

Almighty God, who hast ordained that men should serve thee in serving one another by their labors: have regard, we pray thee, to this nation, oppressed at this time by many burdens. Grant to its citizens grace to work together with honest and faithful hearts, each caring for the good of all; that seeking first thy kingdom and its righteousness, they may have added to them all things needful for their daily sustenance and the common good; through Jesus Christ our Lord. —Geoffrey F. Fisher, 1887-1972