

July 4th Weekend, 2014 St. Augustine's in-the-Woods Freeland. Nigel Taber-Hamilton

A reflection on citizenship

Perhaps 30,000 years ago the first Americans journeyed across a land-bridge from Siberia to Alaska and set foot on the virgin soil of this great continent. We are all immigrants or their children in this land between the shining seas.

And across the deep oceans of water and time we have continued to come from all over this fragile Earth, from North and East, from West and South, willing and unwilling, with little and with much, drawn toward a distant vision of possibility enshrined in the enduring human conviction that we all equally have value.

For us who here find our hearth and home and our community that vision was re-forged in Revolution, solidified by Civil War, tested in other wars beyond our shores, wounded by assassinations, enriched by explorations, expanded by Civil Rights, defined by simple words that speak across time to the deepest hopes and dreams of every human being in every culture and every nation: that we shall all be free some day.

This weekend we have again gathered across this continent as representatives of a greater humanity to celebrate our new birth of freedom now 238 years old, and to remember the toil, tears, joys and celebrations that have, down the ages since then, marked our common journey – and to remember, too, freedom's martyrs who have been the standard-bearers of this struggle.

Our celebrations echo words written by President John Adams not long before he died, some fifty years after The Signing:

“I am apt to believe that [July 4th] will be celebrated, by succeeding generations, as the great anniversary festival. It ought to be commemorated as the day of deliverance by solemn acts of devotion to God Almighty. It ought to be solemnized with pomp and parade, with [shows], games, sports, guns, bells, bonfires and illuminations from one end of this continent to the other from this time forward forever more.”

Yet in the years that have followed the great declaration our emerging commonwealth of justice and freedom has struggled to become the community envisioned by the Founders. We have been slow to put aside divisive identities and to embrace in solidarity the hope at the heart of freedom: one nation, under God, with liberty and justice for all.

In this celebration, the remembrances of the sufferings and sacrifices, the celebrations and the joys, can unite us in that hoped-for common humanity, so that our remembering together will again sanctify the bond of relationship between the living and the dead across the American generations.

But this national vision is not limited to the transient events of one nation's brief history. It is also founded, for us as Christians, on the scriptural vision of love, justice, and reconciliation that

are the imprints of the Kingdom of God and signs for us of God's persevering love.

Our national vision is also founded on the sacred stories that define and shape our common identity: on the goodness of creation, on the exuberance of freed slaves, on the challenges of prophets, on the celebrations of returned exiles, on the transformational encounters with our savior Jesus, and on the radical inclusivity of the risen Christ's New Community.

It is this – our story of faith – that we bring to our national story. This combined vision calls us to remember who we are as Americans **and** as Christians, and hold fast to the best of each.

As the passing years roll on, we are also called to imagine again who we can be, and to work for it - to move beyond petty bickering and cheap self-interest and rededicate ourselves to the ultimate vision of justice and freedom that must always define this nation. So that when in joy we are all reunited on the distant field of peace that lies somewhere beyond this present time we may be able to proclaim this as truth: that in everything we did love was always our guide, and justice ever our watchword, because freedom was our sacred purpose, in this land of majestic purple mountains and amber waves of grain.