

St Thomas  
July 4, 2021  
Trinity V/Independence Day  
rmcneely+

It was 245 years ago on Friday  
That the 2<sup>nd</sup> Continental Congress  
meeting in Philadelphia, unanimously  
Adopted the Richard Henry Lee resolution:  
“That these united colonies  
are and of right ought to be  
free and independent states.”

And it was 245 years ago today that the same 2<sup>nd</sup> Continental  
Congress unanimously adopted the language of the  
Declaration of Independence

So on this day and in this little miracle church,  
On our commemoration  
of these world altering events  
And without apology to our secular friends outside

Let's pause to consider the proper role of God  
In the formation of our Country, our Republic.

And while I speak of God's role in American government  
The principals of God apply to all mankind.

Despite the dawn of the “age of enlightenment”  
That tended to pull people away from God  
Tended to replace God with mankind  
And its supposed, superior newly found  
Intellectual prowess.

245 years ago ours was a nation of religious peoples.  
 Each new colony had brought their religion  
 Some were religious refugees  
 Some were strongly ensconced  
     In the religion of their origin country  
         Such as our own Anglicans  
 Some, like the 1<sup>st</sup> nations were heathens  
     But deeply religious people  
 The people who lived in the Colonies by the 1700s  
 From Vermont  
 To Georgia  
 Were Godly people

So it is in that context that I take a moment this morning  
 And briefly step aside from my usual practice  
 Of talking about the Epistles and Gospels  
 To touch upon the proper role and place of God  
 In our Constitutional Republic

Let's begin at the beginning: The Declaration of Independence

In the short foundational document of our Nation  
 God is mentioned no less than 5 times

But it is the manner in which He was present that is so  
 Instructional

Listen for the source of our freedom in the first two verses of the  
 Declaration:

    “When in the course of human events  
     it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political  
 bands which have connected them with another  
     and to assume among the powers of the earth  
     the separate and equal station  
     to which the **Laws of Nature**  
     and of **Nature's God** entitle them,

a decent respect to the opinion of mankind requires  
that they should declare the causes  
which impel them to the separation.

More famously:

“We hold these truths to be self evident  
that all men are created equal  
and are endowed by their **Creator** with certain unalienable rights,  
that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.  
That to secure these rights governments are instituted among men  
deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.”

You see, The rights of man, come from God.

And right from the beginning  
of the Declaration of Independence itself  
the stated purpose of this new government  
was to secure God given rights;  
to serve the will of God.

Near the end of the Declaration:

“we therefore the Representatives of the United States of  
America appealing to the **Supreme Judge of the world**, for the  
rectitude of our intentions,  
do in the Name and by Authority of good people of these colonies  
solemnly publish and declare  
that these united colonies are and of right ought to be  
free and independent states . . .

And lastly:

“And for the support of this Declaration with a firm reliance  
on the protection of **Divine Providence**,  
we mutually pledge to each other our lives, our fortunes  
and our sacred honor.”

So we leave the Declaration of Independence with the firm notions that

The rights of mankind come from God  
That government exists to secure those rights  
That God will judge what the Founding Father's did  
That they relied upon God's protection in their founding of a new nation.

After adopting the Constitution

One of the first acts of the first Congress  
in 1791

Was the Bill of Rights

And the very first words

of the very first amendment

to the Constitution were these;

“Congress shall make no law establishing a religion

Nor the free exercise thereof”.

God and the freedom of religion were foremost in the minds of the framers of our Constitution and they saw fit that it should be the first order of business.

A word on the doctrine of the separation of church and state: The Baptist Church of Danbury Connecticut was meeting in convention in 1802. They had heard that congress was about to proclaim that the Congregational denomination was to be the religion of these United States and appealed to then President Jefferson to prevent it.

Jefferson wrote them a letter

(presidents did such things then)

and said:

“the first amendment erected a wall of separation between church and state”

and Congress could not establish a state religion.

To the surprise of many, the concept itself (Separation) is not in the Constitution.

Jefferson's letter has been inaccurately exaggerated in legal opinion where secularists use it to eliminate God outside of these walls.

God has been a part of American Government since the beginning and our National monuments and treasures reflect His role and presence;

The Liberty Bell, in Philadelphia Hall that rang out at their first public reading of the Declaration of Independence July 9, 1776 Bares the following scripture cast into the bell: "Leviticus 25: 10 "Proclaim Liberty Throughout the Land unto all the inhabitants thereof."

Just one example of the monuments on the Capital Mall in Washinton D.C.

In 1888, as the work was finishing on the Washington monument, the workers affixed the pyramidal cap of aluminum

And on one plane of the pyramid where only God could see it they stamped the words "Laus Deo" Latin for Praise God.

Time does not permit more on the monuments

At the inauguration of George Washington and at all 59 inaugurations ever since, Presidents have placed their hand on a Bible to take the oath of office

Ever since the first Continental Congress in 1774 through to the current congress, each legislative session begins in prayer. In 1820 they even created and have maintained the office of the Chaplain of Congress (a very busy job these days)

The Supreme Court of the United States begins each session with a prayer and they convene on a dais under a frieze of the 10 Commandments

State and local governments across this land do the same and a recent US Supreme Court decision sustained the practice.

In 1814, That phrase “in God we Trust” was first minted on our money and was most likely inspired by the 4th verse of the Star Spangled Banner written that same year,

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 waive  
 o’re the home of the free  
 and the land of the brave

Our pledge of Allegiance was adopted in 1892 and the words “under God” were included by act of Congress in 1954. They remain there despite bitter litigation of the secularists.

What of our Presidents:

George Washington, a devout Episcopalian  
 Knelt in prayer every day through out the 6 years of the  
 Revolutionary war. And throughout his Presidency.

As General Washington spoke to his beloved troops on the occasion of his retirement from military service, he said:  
 “I shall take my leave-but not without resorting once more to the benign Parent of the Human Race  
 in humble supplication  
 that since He has been pleased to favor the American People with opportunities for deliberating in perfect tranquility and disposition for deciding with unparalleled unanimity in a form of Government for the security of their Union

and the advancement of their happiness  
 so His divine blessing may be equally conspicuous  
 in the enlarged views,  
 the temperate consultations  
 and the wise measures on which the success  
 of this government must depend.

John Adams wrote:

Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious  
 people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other.

A. Lincoln at the dedication of the Cemetery  
 at the Gettysburg battlefield in 1863  
 concludes what has been come to be known  
 as the Gettysburg address like this;

We here resolve  
 That these dead shall not have died in vain  
 That this nation, under God  
 Shall have a new birth of freedom  
 And that this government  
 Of the people  
 By the people  
 And for the people  
 Shall not perish from the face of the earth.

Lincoln's second inaugural address 6 weeks before his death, could  
 have been my sermon for last week (the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity)  
 Judge not and ye shall not be judged.  
 I commend it to you. You can find it carved in the wall to the left  
 of the seated statue of Lincoln at the Lincoln memorial in our  
 nation/s capital.

When Franklin Roosevelt spoke before a joint session of Congress  
 on December 8, 1941 day following the attack on Pearl Harbor to  
 propose a declaration of war on the Empire of Japan the, he said:

“With confidence in our armed forces,  
 With the unbounding determination of our people  
 We will gain the inevitable triumph  
 So help us God.”

In his inaugural address,  
 John F. Kennedy began with a formal salutation  
     to Chief Justice of the Supreme Court  
     the two living Presidents  
     and the vice president  
     all seated behind him on the dais  
 “and” he said “to the reverend clergy” (we should have  
 known something special was coming).

He then said  
 Fellow citizens “...the same revolutionary beliefs  
     for which our forebearers fought  
     are still at issue around the globe:  
         the belief that the rights of man  
     come not from the generosity of the state  
     but from the hand of God.”

He quoted Isaiah;  
 Let both sides unite to heed in all corners of the earth the command  
 of Isaiah: “Undo the heavy burdens and let the oppressed go free”

He mentioned God in other places but concluded with one of the  
 most familiar quotes of the address:

“Let us go forth to lead the land we love  
 Asking His blessing and His help  
 but knowing  
 That here on earth  
 God’s work must truly  
 Be our own.”



President Kennedy brings us full circle,  
Back to the Declaration of Independence.  
Liberty is the gift of God  
And governments exist to secure those gifts.

This is the indisputable History and Foundation of Our Country.  
We might ask ourselves why it is no longer being taught.  
So this afternoon

As you  
    Watch the parade  
Or as you  
    Enjoy the fireworks  
As you  
    Savor the delights of the BBQ  
As you  
    Enjoy the concert  
    Or the gathering of friends and family  
    Or a trip to a favorite recreation spot

Remember this:  
    It is the liberty of a free people  
    That makes it all possible  
And make no mistake about it:  
    That liberty is the gift of God

And  
    as the foundational documents of our Nation attest,  
    as is engraved on our National Monuments  
    and as is reflected in the words of our Presidents

It is the role of government  
to protect  
and nurture  
those God given gifts of Liberty.