

7-6-2008, 4<sup>th</sup> of July A  
Chapelwood UMC, Lake Jackson

True Patriotism  
Psalm 33

Patriotism is the order of the day during this 4<sup>th</sup> of July weekend. I had the opportunity to join one of our Sunday School classes on Friday night to watch the fire works. Jennie Jordan was sitting behind me singing the national anthem. We all get kind of choked up when we see the fire works and hear the patriotic music. We remember the bravery of the men and women who dared to defy the superpower of their day by declaring their independence. We read the words of the Declaration of Independence, and we think, “Surely these words were inspired by God.”

We look back over these 232 years since the signing of the Declaration and see how those thirteen little colonies did win their independence and have grown into the most powerful and prosperous nation in the history of the world.

Certainly there is a great deal for a patriot to be proud of.

However—and you knew there would be a “however,” didn’t you?—we need to ask a question. What is true patriotism?

In one of my doctor of ministries classes, a professor talked about what it takes for a group of people to be strong and successful. He said that whether it be a PTA or a nation, it takes four roles. There have to be leaders to make decisions and organize the members. There have to be workers who carry out the plans of the leaders. There have to be entertainers, cheerleaders who help the members enjoy working together.

And there have to be critics. Critics are usually not popular. The leaders don’t like them, because the critics question their decisions, and leaders don’t like to be questioned. The workers don’t like them, because they just want to get things done. They don’t want to have to ask if what they are doing is the right thing to do, or whether there is a better way to do them. The entertainers don’t like them because the entertainers work hard to make everyone feel good about their organization and what they are doing. Then the critics come along and cause people to question. Critics lower people’s morale.

Almost everyone thinks they would be better off if they could just get rid of the critics. But they wouldn’t. Critics are essential, because they keep us honest. Without critics, it’s just a matter of time before the leaders are corrupted by their power and start putting their own agenda ahead of the people they lead. As long as the critics are watching, the leaders have to use their power to serve the people and not use their power to force the people to serve them.

The critics are constantly ask the people if goals are worthy ones and whether they are being true to their purposes. Without the critics, the whole group can lose its way and become ineffective, or even evil.

Critics are essential to a healthy nation. If you are able to get rid of a critic, somebody else will take his place, because critics are needed.

And yet, they suffer terribly. They irritate people, and most people try to get rid of them. They do everything from trying to ignore them to putting them in jail—or in the worst scenarios, killing them.

So, why do critics keep speaking up when they know they are making life miserable for themselves? The answer is two-fold:

First, they speak up because they truly do care about their nation. They want it to be the best it can be. It breaks their hearts to see what it could be and what it is. They can't keep silent when they see leaders abusing their power, or when the nation has abandoned the principles upon which it was founded. They care too much to keep silent, even if it means that they will be rejected.

Second, they speak up because they have a higher commitment. As much as they love their nation, their greater allegiance is to the Kingdom of God. They understand that the nation was created by God to serve God's purposes. When they see the nation turning away from God's will, they have to speak up.

Now, I want to ask you a question: Who are the true patriots? Is it the people who say nothing when the nation is falling away from its principles and purposes and the powerful are abusing their power? Or is it the people who are willing to suffer rejection and ridicule in order to call the nation to a higher standard?

Throughout the Bible we see that God's people are called by God to be critics. In the Old Testament the prophets were called to challenge kings when they abused their powers. The prophets were called to take the nation to task when they strayed from obedience to the Lord.

Now, Christ calls the Church to be the critics. We are to be the prophets to the nations. We are to point out when the leaders misuse their power to abuse the weak among us. We are to point out when our nation misuses its power to abuse weaker nations.

We are to speak up because we do love our nation. We want our nation to be the best it can be, and it breaks our hearts for it to be anything less. And we are to speak up because we have a higher allegiance. We believe the United States was created to be an instrument of God in creating the Kingdom of Heaven on earth. When our nation loses its sense of calling and becomes more concerned about its own wealth and power and security than it is working to make the world a better place for the people of all the nations, we believe we have to speak up and call our nation back to God and to the principles upon which our nation was founded.

True patriotism is not giving uncritical support and applause to every decision and every action of our nation and its leaders. True patriotism is to examine the decisions and actions of our nation and its leaders, putting them up against the standards of the Sermon on the Mount and the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, and asking, "Are we being true to who we were called to be by our Creator and by our founders?"

When the answer is yes, then critics also get misty-eyed and wave the flag with fervor and sing the national anthem with gusto. But when the answer is no, they shout just as loudly and with just as much fervor that these things should not be. We must be true to ourselves and to our God.

Our founders were true patriots. They saw that injustice was being perpetrated by a dictatorial king and an unjust parliament. When they objected, there were many who accused them of being unpatriotic and even blasphemous. "The king is put on the throne by God," they were told. "You must be obedient to the king." But they were not having any of that. They knew injustice when they saw it. And they would not be bullied into going along with it in the name of patriotism. They passed on that heritage to us.

To those who say that we are not being patriotic when we criticize our nation and its leaders, true patriots will say, “Sloppy, lazy, uncritical, feel good patriotism which lacks the courage to stand up for truth and righteousness is, at best, an inferior form of patriotism.” That’s not exactly the way to win friends and influence people. Real patriots have never been very popular. But real patriots care more about righteousness than popularity.

So, on this weekend of patriotism, I ask you, “What kind of patriot are you?”

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