

The Cost of Freedom

Recognition of Members of the Military
(Any active members, those who've served in the past)

Thank you for answering the call of your nation, for your willingness to serve, for the sacrifices that you made to preserve our freedom. Often, when I have attempted to express appreciation to persons for their past service, they've replied by saying something to the effect that there were lots of others who gave much more.

That's true of course, but you did not know but that such a sacrifice would be required of you—but you still went. So we're proud of all of you today and we thank you for your service to our nation. (Applause)

.....

Let's talk for a moment about "the cost of freedom." Often during the Thanksgiving season, we'll hear stories of the Pilgrims and others who came to this land in search of religious freedom. Many of them died in this pursuit—the rest suffered greatly—but they established colonies and planted seeds that grew into this freedom-loving nation that we call home today.

Many sacrifices were made before the dream was realized, and many others have been required to keep this freedom dream alive. Patrick Henry is one of my heroes in this effort.

I've shared with you before how that Patrick Henry came to the aid of some early Baptists who were imprisoned in Richmond, VA, for, of all things, preaching the Gospel of Christ. Freedom is a difficult topic, you see.

We all want freedom for ourselves. We're just not sure how much freedom we're willing to extend to others. It's so easy to convince ourselves that we deserve to be free because WE will use our freedom wisely; while at the same time, denying freedom to others because we're not convinced THEY WILL.

This is why Patrick Henry had to help the Baptists. Virginia, like so many of the early colonies, had a state church. If you lived there, part of your taxes went to support that church; and it was

against the law for you to be part of any other church if the state had not okayed it--or to listen to any minister if the state had not licensed him to preach—which is what landed those early Baptist preachers in jail.

This all sounds so foreign to us today, but it wasn't foreign then. It was, sadly, the American way. I say sadly, because this is what our forefathers supposedly came here to escape—religious persecution.

But again, freedom is tough. Just because we demand it for ourselves doesn't mean we will willingly extend freedom to others—especially if that means that in their freedom, they'll choose--for who knows what reason--to believe or to act in ways that are different from us!

Patrick Henry, along with others that we regard as great patriots today, understood that none of us are really free unless we all are. His convictions about this ran so deep he was willing to put his life on the line. As he spoke before a stormy session of the Virginia legislature, this courageous leader inspired that gathering to take action when he said:

"There is no retreat but in submission and slavery! Our chains are forged! Their clanking may be heard in the plains of Boston. The war is inevitable, and let it come ... I repeat, sir, let it come ... Is life so dear, or peace so sweet, as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery? Forbid it, Almighty God! I know not what course others may take; but as for me, give me liberty or give me death!

Patrick Henry was clearly ready to suffer the cost of freedom, and his speech persuaded many to pledge their very lives and fortunes to the cause of American independence. The date was March 23, 1775.

Less than two months later, a courageous group of farmers carrying hunting rifles and calling themselves "Minutemen" confronted some British troops. Captain John Parker issued this order to his men: "Stand your ground. Don't fire unless fired upon; but if they mean to have a war, then let it begin here."

A single shot was fired, followed later by many more. That first round, however, became known as “the shot heard ‘round the world.”

This began eight years of awful war, the loss of many lives and livelihoods—you’ve no doubt heard the stories of the original signers of the Declaration of Independence, and the terrible price they paid for attaching their names to that document. I invite you to listen again to how this declaration begins:

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 entitles them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation. We hold these truths to be self-evident—that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

Those words, along with many others we find in our founding documents, make it clear to me that these early patriots believed that the freedom which they were fighting for was not some mere human notion.

Instead, it grew out of a desire that Almighty God had planted in their hearts. They were endowed by their Creator with both the yearning and the right to live free.

This is what motivated them to risk so much in their pursuit of freedom. It’s also why there are so many crosses and stars of David in our military cemeteries here and around the world.

And it’s why some among us stood earlier, all thankful no doubt to have survived their battles, but willing none-the-less to have given so much more if it had been necessary.

Someone made this observation: “The temptation is to enjoy the fruits of citizenship without tending the tree of liberty.” Most of us have done little to earn the freedoms we enjoy.

We did not go to foreign lands to fight for them. Most of us have not been called upon to take courageous stands right here at

home to defend the rights and freedoms of those who were being denied them.

But this does not lessen in any way our responsibility before God to be willing to pay the cost of freedom when called upon. And if we understand what freedom is, it will be as important to us that others have their freedoms as it is that we have ours.

Tending the tree of liberty means that we want all people to enjoy its fruits; and we're willing to do the work and, when necessary, to pay the costs to make sure this happens. Thank God for those who've come before us and have been willing to work and sacrifice for the blessing of freedom.

Now, as a tribute to those who have paid with their lives, I invite you to listen as our men's ensemble sings, "Mansions of the Lord."

A Reflection on Our Blessings
(following America the Beautiful)

In our worship of God this morning, we have reflected on the blessings we enjoy in this free land. If we believe that God is the source of all blessings, then surely it is true that God has blessed America.

Many of these blessings have come to us through the vision, the hard work, and the sacrifices of those who have come before us. We should never forget their sacrifices. We are thankful to them, and we are thankful to God.

You know, we don't cease being Americans when we walk through the doors of the church any more than we cease being Christians when we walk back out—so being Christian and being American are both aspects of who we are--whether on a Sunday morning in worship or the following day on the job or at school or wherever life takes us.

So when the Lord's Day happens to also be a national holiday, Independence Day, we do our best to make the worship of God our focus—because God alone is worthy of our worship, and worshipping our nation would be just as idolatrous as any other form of idolatry.

But as we worship God, we express gratitude to Him for the blessings we share, the lifestyles we enjoy, and the freedoms that have made these possible for ourselves and others.

As Christians, we also remember that the greatest freedom of all is the freedom from sin and death we have in Christ Jesus. The greatest sacrifice of all is the one He made for us on Calvary's cross.

The greatest blessing we have is the assurance that we are part of His kingdom which will continue through all eternity, long after America and all the other nations and civilizations of this world have ceased to be.

It is this Good News, friends, that our nation and our world most need to hear...and take to heart. And guess what: we have the freedom to share this Gospel of Christ openly. And we have the freedom to celebrate the joy Christ brings to our lives in worship.

Again, we are blessed. We are abundantly blessed. Be thankful.

At the same time, be diligent in defending and insisting upon freedom for yourself and for others—while being faithful to make good use of this freedom to share God’s love and to witness to the world concerning the liberating power of the risen Christ in us. For freedom, Christ has set us free!

O God, our help in ages past, our hope for years to come,
Be Thou our guard while life shall last, and our eternal home.
Let’s sing this together, No. 74.

(NOTE: For full service, cf. *July 4 2010 Service* file)