A Service of Lessons & Carols for Independence Day

*Prelude:*

*(Please stand as you are able)*

**OPENING SENTENCE**

You are no longer strangers and sojourners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God. Ephesians 2:19

Officiant: Let us pray.

Gracious God, you have made all the peoples of the earth for your glory, to serve you in freedom and in peace: Give to the people of our country a zeal for justice and the strength of forbearance, that we may use our liberty in accordance with your gracious will; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. **Amen.**

**HYMN***:* All My Hope on God is Founded

*Please be seated.*

*Officiant:*

Today, we celebrate the American ideal: life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, for all people.

The men who framed the Declaration of Independence and later, the Constitution and Bill of Rights, envisioned a nation “conceived in liberty," a country formed intentionally by the will of the people rather than through conquest.

Living out those ideals in our national life has proven to be the task of several lifetimes. It turns out that the struggle for liberty and justice for all is never done. These struggles have produced generations of eloquent and impassioned poetry and rhetoric, and we will hear some of those voices today.

The late, great Molly Ivins wrote: “It is possible to read the history of this country as one long struggle to extend the liberties established in our Constitution to everyone in America.”

And, as challenging as the struggle for liberty can be, we are, first and foremost, followers of Jesus, who calls us both to freedom, and to mutual care and responsibility for one another and the world in which we live.

**FROM THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE:**

*Officiant:* We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal,

**People: that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.**

*Reader 1:* That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.

*Reader 2:* We, therefore, the Representatives of the united States of America, in General Congress, Assembled, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions, do, in the Name, and by the Authority of the good People of these Colonies, solemnly publish and declare, That these United Colonies are, and of Right ought to be Free and Independent States;

*Reader 3:* and that as Free and Independent States, they have full Power to levy War, conclude Peace, contract Alliances, establish Commerce, and to do all other Acts and Things which Independent States may of right do.

**All: 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.**

*Please stand.*   
*Officiant:*  Let us pray.

*For the Nation*

Lord God Almighty, you have made all the peoples of the earth for your glory, to serve you in freedom and in peace: Give to the people of our country a zeal for justice and the strength of forbearance, that we may use our liberty in accordance with your gracious will; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

**Hymn: My Country, ‘Tis of Thee - verse 1**

*Please be seated.*

*Officiant*: We hold these truths to be self-evident, yet we must always be reminded of their meaning.

*Reader*: Hear the voice of Scripture:

The LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who is not partial and takes no bribe, who executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and who loves the strangers, providing them food and clothing. You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. You shall fear the LORD your God; him alone you shall worship; to him you shall hold fast, and by his name you shall swear. He is your praise; he is your God, who has done for you these great and awesome things that your own eyes have seen.

*Deuteronomy 10:17-21*

*Reader*: Here ends the reading.

**HYMN:** God of Grace and God of Glory

*Officiant:* Hear the voice of a young American poet:

**“The Hill We Climb”,** excerpted *by Amanda Gorman*

When day comes, we ask ourselves,

where can we find light in this never-ending shade?

The loss we carry. A sea we must wade.

We braved the belly of the beast.

We’ve learned that quiet isn’t always peace,

And the norms and notions of what

“just” is isn’t always justice.

And yet the dawn is ours before we knew it.

Somehow we do it.

Somehow we weathered and witnessed a nation that isn’t broken, but simply unfinished.

We are striving to forge our union with purpose.

To conpose a country committed to all cultures, colors, characters and conditions of man.

And so we lift our gaze, not to what stands between us, but what stands before us.

We close the divide because we know to put our future first, we must first put our differences aside.

We lay down our arms so we can reach out our arms to one another.

We seem harm to none and harmony for all.

Let the globe, if nothing else, say this is true.

The even as we grieved, we grew.

That even as we hurt, we hoped.

That even as we tired, we tried.

That we’ll forever be tied together, victorious.

Not because we will never again know defeat, but because

we will never again sow division.

Scripture tells us to envision that everyone shall sit under their own vine and fig tree,

and no one shall make them afraid.

If we’re to live up to our own time, then victory won’t lie in the blade,

but in all the bridges we’ve made.

That is the promise to glade, the hill we climb, if only we dare.

It’s because being American is more than a pride we inherit.

It’s the past we step into and how we repair it.

We will not march back to what was, but move to what shall be:

A country that is bruised but whole, benevolent but bold, fierce and free.

We will not be turned around or interrupted by intimidation because we know our inaction and interia will be the inheritance of the next generation, become the future.

Our blunders become their burdens.

But one thing is certain.

If we merge mercy with might, and might with right,

then love becomes our legacy

And change our children’s birthright.

So let us leave behind a country better than the one we were left.

When day comes, we step out of the shade of flame and unafraid.

The new dawn balloons as we free it.

For there is always light, if we’re only brave enough to see it.

If only we’re brave enough to be it.

*Silence*

**Anthem**

*Reader*: Hear from our Presidents:

With malice toward none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation's wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan--to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace, among ourselves, and with all nations. - *from Abraham Lincoln’s 2nd Inaugural Address*

*Reader*:

The world is very different now. For man holds in his mortal hands the power to abolish all forms of human poverty and all forms of human life. And yet the same revolutionary beliefs for which our forebears 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.

We dare not forget today that we are the heirs of that first revolution. Let the word go forth from this time and place, to friend and foe alike, that the torch has been passed to a new generation of Americans -- born in this century, tempered by war, disciplined by a hard and bitter peace, proud of our ancient heritage, and unwilling to witness or permit the slow undoing of those human rights to which this nation has always been committed, and to which we are committed today at home and around the world.  
  
Let every nation know, whether it wishes us well or ill, that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe, to assure the survival and the success of liberty.

Finally, whether you are citizens of America or citizens of the world, ask of us here the same high standards of strength and sacrifice which we ask of you. With a good conscience our only sure reward, with history the final judge of our deeds, 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.

*From JFK’s Inaugural Address*

**HYMN: This is My Song (***Finlandia)*

*Reader:* Hear from one of our prophets:

And so even though we face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream.

I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal."

I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia, the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood.

I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.

I have a dream today!

I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, and every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight; "and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed and all flesh shall see it together."2

This is our hope, and this is the faith that I go back to the South with.

With this faith, we will be able to hew out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope. With this faith, we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood. With this faith, we will be able to work together, to pray together, to struggle together, to go to jail together, to stand up for freedom together, knowing that we will be free one day.

And this will be the day -- this will be the day when all of God's children will be able to sing with new meaning:

My country 'tis of thee, sweet land of liberty, of thee I sing.

Land where my fathers died, land of the Pilgrim's pride,

From every mountainside, let freedom ring!

*From Martin Luther King’s “I Have a Dream” speech, August 28, 1963.*

**Song: This Land Is Your Land**

This land is your land

**Chorus:**  This land is my land  
From California to the New York island;   
From the red wood forest to the Gulf Stream waters   
This land was made for you and Me.

As I was walking that ribbon of highway,   
I saw above me that endless skyway:   
I saw below me that golden valley:   
This land was made for you and me.

**Chorus**

I've roamed and rambled and I followed my footsteps   
To the sparkling sands of her diamond deserts;   
And all around me a voice was sounding:   
This land was made for you and me.

**Chorus**

Deacon: Hear the voice of Jesus:

Jesus said, "You have heard that it was said, `You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

Matthew 5:43-48

*Deacon:* We proclaim together:

**Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**

**Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.**

**Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.**

**Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.**

**Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.**

**Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.**

**Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.**

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**Prayers of the People**

Intercessor: We pray for our nation:

Almighty God, giver of all good things:

We thank you for the natural majesty and beauty of this land.

They restore us, though we often destroy them.

**Heal us.**

We thank you for the great resources of this nation.

They make us rich, though we often exploit them.

**Forgive us.**

We thank you for the men and women who have made this country strong.

They are models for us, though we often fall short of them.

**Inspire us.**

We thank you for the torch of liberty which has been lit in this land.

It has drawn people from every nation, though we have often hidden from its light.

**Enlighten us.**

We thank you for the faith we have inherited in all its rich variety.

It sustains our life, though we have been faithless again and again.

**Renew us.**

Help us, O Lord, to finish the good work here begun. Strengthen our efforts to blot out ignorance and prejudice, and to bring about a just society. And hasten the day when all our people, with many voices in one united chorus, will glorify your holy Name. **Amen.**

*For Peace*

Eternal God, in whose perfect kingdom no sword is drawn but the sword of righteousness, no strength known but the strength of love: So mightily spread abroad your Spirit, that all peoples may be gathered under the banner of the Prince of Peace, as children of one Father; to whom be dominion and glory, now and for ever. Amen.

*Reader:* A final word from one of our poets:

**“The New Colossus” *by Emma Lazarus***

**Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame,**

**With conquering limbs astride from land to land;**

**Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand**

**A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame**

**Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name**

**Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand**

**Glows world-wide welcome; her mild eyes command**

**The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame.**

**"Keep ancient lands, your storied pomp!" cries she**

**With silent lips. "Give me your tired, your poor,**

**Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,**

**The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.**

**Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,**

**I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"**

Emma Lazarus

**Blessing**:

May God, who created us for love, dwell in you;

May God, who created us for liberty, set you free from every bond,

save for the tie that binds us together;

May God, who gave us the gift of one another, bless us with the spirit of unity,

the bond of peace, and the will to continue the grand experiment of this nation;

And may the blessing of God, our Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer,

be upon you and remain with you forever. Amen.

**HYMN: America, the Beautiful #719**

Postlude