

A Celebration of God and Country in Word and Song

Leader: Please be seated. This morning we celebrate God and our country in music and song. Our readers are (insert names).”

Reader 1: This morning we are celebrating the glory of God and the birthday of our country using Holy Scripture, songs and the words of some of the Presidents of the United States. As we begin, please stand as we sing verses 1 and 4 of “My Country, ‘Tis of Thee.”

Song: “My Country, ‘Tis of Thee” (Red 529)

Please be seated.

Reader 2: In a 4th of July sermon, the Past President of the Eastern District of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, Reverend Chris Wicher, once reminded us that:

“We live in two kingdoms - the kingdom of this world which includes our country, flag, government, paying taxes, and all matters pertaining to the common good, and the kingdom of God which includes saving faith in Christ Jesus, discipleship, church life, mission work, Christ alone. These two kingdoms are clearly different from each other yet incredibly combined in each and every Christian.”

Jesus said "be in the world but not of the world." He also said you are "light" and "salt" of the earth.

Reader 1: So how are these two kingdoms combined and what does it mean to us as citizens of both? Listen to the words of Romans 13:1-7(MSG):

Be a good citizen. All governments are under God. Insofar as there is peace and order, it's God's order. So live responsibly as a citizen. If you're irresponsible to the state, then you're irresponsible with God, and God will hold you responsible. Duly constituted authorities are only a threat if you're trying to get by with something. Decent citizens should have nothing to fear.

Do you want to be on good terms with the government? Be a responsible citizen and you'll get on just fine, the government working to your advantage. But if you're breaking the rules right and left, watch out. The police aren't there just to be admired in their uniforms. God also has an interest in keeping order, and he uses them to do it. That's why you must live responsibly—not just to avoid punishment but also because it's the right way to live.

That's also why you pay taxes—so that an orderly way of life can be maintained. Fulfill your obligations as a citizen. Pay your taxes, pay your bills, respect your leaders.

Reader 2: James Madison told us the principles upon which our country was founded:

We have staked the whole future of American civilization not on the power of government, far from it. We have staked the whole of our political institutions upon the capacity of mankind for self-government, upon the capacity of each and all of us to govern ourselves according to the commandments of God. The future and success of America is not in this Constitution, but in the laws of God upon which this Constitution is founded.

Reader 1: And George Washington talked about our religion as it applies to our nation's people:

"While we are zealously performing the duties of good citizens and soldiers, we certainly ought not to be inattentive to the higher duties of religion. To the distinguished character of Patriot, it should be our highest glory to add the more distinguished character of Christian."

We sing verses 1 and 4 of "America the Beautiful."

Song: America the Beautiful (Red 531)

Reader 2: The Bible reminds us:

Proverbs 28:2(NLT) When there is moral rot within a nation, its government topples easily. But wise and knowledgeable leaders bring stability.

And:

Proverbs 16:12-13(MSG) Good leaders abhor wrongdoing of all kinds; sound leadership has a moral foundation. Good leaders cultivate honest speech; they love advisors who tell them the truth.

The Bible also tells us:

Proverbs 21:15(NIV) When justice is done, it brings joy to the righteous but terror to evildoers.

And:

Proverbs 29:4(NIV) By justice a king gives a country stability, but one who is greedy for bribes tears it down.

St. Paul gave instructions to Timothy which apply to all Christians:

1 Timothy 2:1-3(MSG) The first thing I want you to do is pray. Pray every way you know how, for everyone you know. Pray especially for rulers and their governments to rule well so we can be quietly about our business of living simply, in humble contemplation. This is the way our Savior God wants us to live.

Reader 1: In the words of Thomas Jefferson:

God who gave us life gave us liberty. And can the liberties of a nation be thought secure when we have removed their only firm basis, a conviction in the minds of the people that these liberties are of the Gift of God?

According to John Adams:

The general principles on which the fathers achieved independence were. . . the general principles of Christianity. . . I will avow that I then believed, and now believe, that those general principles of Christianity are as eternal and immutable as the existence and attributes of God; and that those principles of liberty are as unalterable as human nature.

And from his son John Quincy Adams:

The Highest glory of the American Revolution was this; that it connected in one indissoluble bond, the principles of self-government with the principles of Christianity.

Reader 2: The early presidents of our country knew who was in charge both at home and around the world. Their political perceptions were based on the Bible. Listen to the words of Ephesians 1:20-23(MSG):

All this energy issues from Christ: God raised him from death and set him on a throne in deep heaven, in charge of running the universe, everything from galaxies to governments, no name and no power exempt from his rule. And not just for the time being, but forever. He is in charge of it all, has the final word on everything. At the center of all this, Christ rules the church. The church, you see, is not peripheral to the world; the world is peripheral to the church. The church is Christ's body, in which he speaks and acts, by which he fills everything with his presence.

Reader 1: We now sing verse 1 of "Faith of our Fathers."

Song: "Faith of our Fathers." (Green 500) verse 1

As good citizens we are to respect the land we live in and pray for our leaders. In Titus 3:1-2(MSG), we are told to:

Remind the people to respect the government and be law-abiding, always ready to lend a helping hand. No insults, no fights. God's people should be bighearted and courteous.

Peter in 1 Peter 2:13-17(MSG) instructs us to:

Make the Master proud of you by being good citizens. Respect the authorities, whatever their level; they are God's emissaries for keeping order. It is God's will that by doing good, you might cure the ignorance of the fools who think you're a danger to society. Exercise your freedom by serving God, not by breaking the rules. Treat everyone you meet with dignity. Love your spiritual family. Revere God. Respect the government.

Reader 2: Abraham Lincoln wanted people to understand what can happen to our country when we lose touch with God. His words seem as true today as they did when he issued his Thanksgiving Prayer in 1863:

"We have forgotten God. We have forgotten the gracious hand which preserved us in peace and multiplied and enriched and strengthened us, and we have vainly imagined, in the deceitfulness of our hearts, that all these blessings were produced by some superior wisdom and virtue of our own. Intoxicated with unbroken success, we have become too self-sufficient to feel the necessity of redeeming and preserving grace, too proud to pray to the God that made us."

Lincoln also remarked:

"It is the duty of nations as well as men, to own their dependence upon the overruling power of God and to recognize the sublime truth announced in the Holy Scriptures and proven by all history, that those nations only are blessed whose God is the LORD."

We sing the "Battle Hymn of the Republic"

Song: "Battle Hymn of the Republic." (Green 332) all 3 verses

Reader 1: In case you have the idea that only Presidents of the far past felt strongly about religion and government, here are quotes from some of the 20th and 21st Century presidents of our country:

Theodore Roosevelt

"Every thinking man... realizes that the teachings of the Bible are so interwoven and intertwined with our whole civic and social life that it would be literally, I do not mean figuratively, but literally impossible for us to figure what the loss would be if these teachings were removed. We would lose all the standards by which we now judge both public and private morals; all the standards toward which we, with more or less resolution, strive to raise ourselves."

Woodrow Wilson

"America was born to exemplify that devotion to the elements of righteousness which are derived from Holy Scripture."

Reader 2:

Calvin Coolidge

"The foundations of our society and our government rest so much on the teachings of the Bible, that it would be difficult to support them if faith in these teachings would cease to be practically universal in our country."

Herbert Hoover

"Our strength lies in spiritual concepts. It lies in public sensitivities to evil. Our greatest danger is not from invading armies. Our dangers are that we may commit suicide from within by complaisance with evil, or by public tolerance of scandalous behavior."

Franklin Roosevelt

" 'Peace on earth, good will toward men' - democracy must cling to that message. For it is my deep conviction that democracy cannot live without that true religion which gives a nation a sense of justice and moral purpose."

Reader 1:

Harry Truman

“The fundamental basis of this nation’s laws was given to Moses on the Mount. The fundamental basis of our Bill of Rights comes from the teachings we get from Exodus and Saint Matthew, from Isaiah and Saint Paul.... If we don’t have a proper fundamental moral background, we will finally end up with a totalitarian government which does not believe in rights for anybody except the State!”

John F. Kennedy

“The rights of man come not from the generosity of the state but from the hand of God.”

Lyndon B. Johnson

"We need to remember that the separation of church and state must never mean the separation of religious values from the lives of public servants. . . If we who serve free men today are to differ from the tyrants of this age, we must balance the powers in our hands with God in our hearts."

Dwight D. Eisenhower

"Without God, there could be no American form of government, nor an American way of life. Recognition of the Supreme Being is the first, the most basic expression of Americanism."

Jimmy Carter

"You can't divorce religious belief and public service. . . I've never detected any conflict between God's will and my political duty. If you violate one, you violate the other."

Reader 2:

Ronald Reagan

“Without God, democracy will not and cannot long endure. If we ever forget that we are one nation under God, then we will be a nation gone under."

George H.W. Bush

“For we know that we are given power, not to advance our own purposes, nor to make a great show in the world, nor a name. There is but one just use of power, and it is to serve people. Help us to remember it Lord.”

George W. Bush

"America stands for liberty, for the pursuit of happiness and for the inalienable right for life. This right to life cannot be granted nor denied by government, because it does not come from government, it comes from the Creator of life."

Reader 1:

Barack Obama

“What better time than these changing, tumultuous times to have Jesus standing beside us, steadying our minds, cleansing our hearts, pointing us toward what matters?”

Donald Trump

As one nation under God, we are greater than the hardships we face.”

Joe Biden

You know, at a moment of great division, our democracy is at...grave risk. I pray that we follow what Jesus taught us: to serve rather than be served.

We sing verses 1 and 2 of “God of Our Fathers.”

Song: “God of Our Fathers” (Red 532)

Reader 2: As we live in the two worlds, the kingdom of Jesus Christ and of our nation, we can do no better than to follow the instructions of our Lord and Savior, who died and rose for our salvation. He told us in Matthew 22:21 to:

“Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s.”

Reader 1: Let us pray. Lord, as we celebrate our country’s birthday, help us always to remember and follow your commands. We thank you for your blessings to us as a nation. Please continue to provide us with leaders under whom we can remain free to do your will, both in our country and throughout the world. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

Music for this service

Opening song:

Star Spangled Banner, Red 528 verse 1

Sung during the presentation:

“America the Beautiful” (Red 531) verses 1 and 4

“Faith of our Fathers.” (Green 500) verse 1

“Battle Hymn of the Republic.” (Green 332) all 3 verses

“God of Our Fathers” (Red 532) verses 1 and 2

Communion Hymns:

Savior Like a Shepherd Lead Us Red 294

Now Thank We All Our God Red 18

Closing hymn

Before You, Lord, We Bow Green 401 verses 1 and 2

Presidents quoted in order of appearance in text:

1. James Madison
2. George Washington
3. Thomas Jefferson
4. John Adams
5. John Quincy Adams
6. Abraham Lincoln
7. Theodore Roosevelt
8. Woodrow Wilson
9. Calvin Coolidge
10. Herbert Hoover
11. Franklin D. Roosevelt
12. Harry Truman
13. John F. Kennedy
14. Lyndon Johnson
15. Dwight Eisenhower
16. Jimmy Carter
17. Ronald Reagan
18. George H.W. Bush
19. George W. Bush
20. Barak Obama
21. Donald Trump
22. Joe Biden

Presidential pictures can be found at <https://www.loc.gov/free-to-use/presidential-portraits/>