

**Sermon for Morning Prayer
Independence Day (July 4)**

The Reverend Warren E. Shaw, Priest Associate

Lessons:¹

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the twenty-sixth Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah.²

“In that day shall this song be sung in the land of Judah; We have a strong city; salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks. Open ye the gates, that the righteous nation which keepeth the truth may enter in. Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee. Trust ye in the LORD for ever: for in the LORD JEHOVAH is everlasting strength:

“ ... The way of the just is uprightness: thou, most upright, dost weigh the path of the just. Yea, in the way of thy judgments, O LORD, have we waited for thee; the desire of our soul is to thy name, and to the remembrance of thee. ...

“LORD, thou wilt ordain peace for us: for thou also hast wrought all our works in us.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the thirty-first Verse of the eighth Chapter of the Gospel According to St. John.³

“... Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.

“They answered him, We be Abraham’s seed, and were never in bondage to any man: how sayest thou, Ye shall be made free? Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin. And the servant abideth not in the house for ever: but the Son abideth ever. If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text: “He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for my sake will find it.”⁴

Homily:

Thomas Jefferson begins the Declaration Independence by citing what I would call “Natural law”, and what he called “the laws of nature and nature’s God.” Jefferson may not have been much a of a Christian, but he was a theist, and he believed that God intends for all men to be free.

Freedom for Jefferson, and for all the Founding Fathers, did not mean what it seems to mean today. It did not mean, and it does not mean, that there is no law that must be obeyed. That’s the definition of chaos. Natural law is real law and stands over against individual judgment. It assumes that the individual is not really sovereign and does not have the right to decide all moral questions for himself without reference to any external authority. Good is not whatever I decide it is. Evil is not whatever I want it to be. Adam and Eve made the fatal mistake of believing that it could be so when they decided to eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

Truth is not something that varies from one individual to another. And yet that is how so many people today define it. America today has thrown off the restraints of natural law in favor of abortion on demand, legitimatizing and even honoring homosexual relationships, the transformation of marriage into nothing more than a temporary relationship designed to make people happy. This radical individualism results in moral and eventually social chaos. The only way that chaos can be controlled is by the imposition of a strong central government on the activities of the people.

The French turned to Napoleon to control the chaos that resulted from their revolution. They were not the first people to ex-

change their new found freedom for a sense of security and order. The Jews themselves did it when they demanded a king, against the advice of Samuel. They too learned that a powerful central government tends to be self-serving and is prone to corruption and tyranny.

The Old Testament teaches that Israel was set free by the power of God in order that they might serve him rather than their Egyptian masters and their pagan gods. When the Jews chose to forget God's laws and to serve other Gods, God returned them to a state of bondage.

That, I am afraid, is where our country is also headed. There are signs that it is happening already. Some of the grievances cited by the Declaration of Independence against the King of England could be levied and have been leveled against our own elected president. Let me give you some examples:

[The king] "has forbidden our governors to pass laws of immediate and pressing importance, unless suspended in their operation till his assent should be obtained; and when so suspended he has utterly neglected to attend to them." Could that apply to Arizona?

"He has erected a multitude of New Offices, and sent hither swarms of Officers to harass our people and eat out their substance." Think about all the new "Czars" and oversight committees that have been created.

Jefferson also mentions cutting off of trade with foreign nations and imposing taxes without our consent. I'm sure you can all think of contemporary examples of that.

I don't like to talk about politics, but since the event we are observing today is a political event, I felt obliged to dip into the subject. But I what I'm really trying to illuminate is what is expressed in the Collect for the Day.⁵

The Collect acknowledges that is by the power of God that our fathers won their liberties of old. Just as the Jews were delivered from bondage in order that they might better serve God, we too must remember that the reason we were delivered from the bondage of the King of England was not so that we might serve our own individual wills and desires, or even the wills of our own elected leaders, but rather that we might serve the King of Kings and become the kind of people he created us to be.

As long as we refuse to be governed by “the laws of nature and nature’s God” we will surely be governed by the laws of men who answer to no higher authority than themselves. It has happened before. It seems to be happening again.

Let us pray:

ALMIGHTY God, who hast given us this good land for our heritage; We humbly beseech thee that we may always prove ourselves a people mindful of thy favour and glad to do thy will. Bless our land with honourable industry, sound learning, and pure manners. Save us from violence, discord, and confusion; from pride and arrogancy, and from every evil way. Defend our liberties, and fashion into one united people the multitudes brought hither out of many kindreds and tongues. Endue with the spirit of wisdom those to whom in thy Name we entrust the authority of government, that there may be justice and peace at home, and that, through obedience to thy law, we may show forth thy praise among the nations of the earth. In the time of prosperity, fill our hearts with thankfulness, and in the day of trouble, suffer not our trust in thee to fail; all which we ask through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*⁶

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St. David’s Anglican Church
Charlottesville, Virginia

July 4, 2010

¹ *Psalms and Lessons for the Church Year* (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xlii (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

² Isaiah 26: 1-4, 7-8, 12 (KJV).

³ St. John 8: 31-36 (KJV).

⁴ St. Matthew 10: 39 (RSV).

⁵ “O ETERNAL God, through whose mighty power our fathers won their liberties of old; Grant, we beseech thee, that we and all the people of this land may have grace to maintain these liberties in righteousness and peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.”

⁶ *For Our County*, Prayers and Thanksgivings, The Book of Common Prayer 36 (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).