

**Reading:** Psalm 33 (English Standard Version)

**Hymn:** God of our Fathers

I want to read the words of a hymn that is a prayer for our nation. It is a good prayer for these days.

**God of our fathers, whose almighty hand  
Leads forth in beauty all the starry band  
Of shining worlds in splendor through the skies,  
Our grateful songs before Thy throne arise.**

**Thy love divine hath led us in the past,  
In this free land by Thee our lot is cast;  
Be Thou our ruler, guardian, guide and stay,  
Thy Word our law, Thy paths our chosen way.**

**From war's alarms, from deadly pestilence,  
Be Thy strong arm our ever sure defense;  
Thy true religion in our hearts increase,  
Thy bounteous goodness nourish us in peace.**

**Refresh Thy people on their toilsome way,  
Lead us from night to never-ending day;  
Fill all our lives with love and grace divine,  
And glory, laud, and praise be ever Thine.**

**Morning Prayer Time:**

**Scripture:** 1 Peter 2:11-17

**Message: Godly People Make Good Citizens**

This weekend, our nation is celebrating the 244<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our Independence. The 4<sup>th</sup> of July is always a festive holiday. Picnics, large gatherings with family and friends, baseball, fire works. But this year's celebrations have had to be a bit more subdued, due to the Covid 19 virus. The virus is still here and it is still spreading, and it is still impacting our lives significantly. Many people are continuing to observe social distancing and avoiding large gatherings of people in order to avoid unknowingly coming in contact with someone who has the virus, or to avoid spreading our germs to others – unknowingly. I sense that there is a lot of frustration that we are still dealing with this virus after 4 months, and it appears that we will be continuing to deal with it for some time. People are becoming impatient, angry, suspicious that we are being duped. Many people are resisting the instructions of our leaders to protect ourselves and others. Maybe you are just not feeling very festive about this special holiday. Where do we as followers of Jesus come out in the midst of all of this uncertainty and frustration and anger? What should our response be. What can we contribute anything for the good of our nation? How can we as followers of Jesus be good citizens? **Perhaps we can bring a different perspective and attitude that will make a difference to some people.**

I think that Peter provides some guidance for us here. We are primarily going to be looking at verses 11 – 17, but I want us to see these verses against the backdrop of what he tells us earlier in this chapter. In verses 9 – 10, Peter uses some words to describe the Church. He says the Church is a “**Chosen People, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession....Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God.**” Its like we are a nation within a nation. Then Peter moves on to more practical instruction. In light of who you are, here is how you should conduct your lives. The NIV text has a paragraph

heading before verse 11 (not inspired by the way). These headings help us to see what is going to be discussed in the following verses. The heading here reads: **Living Godly Lives in a Pagan Society**. As followers of Jesus who are members of this “Chosen, and Holy People” here is what your lives will look like in this world. In this world that often does not honor or respect God. As we think about what impact we can have on our nation in these difficult days we are living in, here are some ways we can make a difference.

1. **Live a good life**
2. **Live to bring glory to God**
3. **Live a life that treats others with love and respect.**

**Live a Good Life:** In spite of all that is negative that is going on around us, we don't have to be dragged down to the level of the world. We don't have to share the negative feelings that others have. We don't have to participate in the bad behavior of others. Peter is writing to Christians who were living in a corrupt world. He was writing to believers who were being persecuted for taking a stand for Jesus. He wants to encourage them. He begins by reminding us that in reality we as followers of Jesus are actually foreigners and exiles in the world. Our true citizenship is in heaven. Sometimes we get so wrapped up with what is going on in this world. We get drawn into the political fray and we start to put our hope in one political party or the other. And when we do that we always seem get drawn into the divisiveness of our culture. We criticize or condemn those who do not agree with us. But we should live with a sense of detachment from this world. We can take a stand and participate in the voting process, but we realize that the outcome does not impact who we are or how we live our lives. Because our loyalty is elsewhere, Peter says that as people who do not really have a stake in this world, we should resist the kind of behavior that others in this world find acceptable. ***“Abstain from sinful desires which wage war against your soul.”*** Our lifestyle should be noticeably different. Because we are not citizens of this world, our behavior should not be characterized by the values of this world. We should be guided by the values and principles of the heavenly nation of which we are citizens. Godly citizens then choose to be good citizens. We choose to live a GOOD life, rather than get drawn into the evil fray of this world.

**Live to bring glory to God.** Secondly Peter says that we need to remember that our purpose in this world is not to live for ourselves, but to live in such a way that God will receive glory. ***“Live such good lives among the pagans [unbelievers], that though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day He visits us.”*** The Christians that Peter is writing to were falsely accused of crimes and immorality, in order to punish them and persecute them. Peter's challenge to them is to live such good lives that all false accusations would come to nothing. In vs. 15, Peter says that by doing good they would silence their accusers. The word literally means to “muzzle”. Their accusers would be forced into silence, almost against their will. We may feel that we as followers of Jesus are always under attack, that we are criticized for what we believe. But we must not join in their battles. We must silence our enemies with our Good Behavior.

Peter says that if we live our lives without reproach, that on the day of God's visitation, these opponents of ours, these enemies of ours will give glory to God. That expression – **the day God visits us** – could refer to the last days when all men will come before God at the judgment. OR it could refer to a day when these unbelievers have an encounter with God Himself. When they encounter God's Spirit, they will have no excuse, no reason not to repent and believe. So your behavior could be the thing that will result in their conversion when they meet God. **Live a Good Life. Live in such a way that others will give glory to God because of your witness.** Practicing kindness and goodness to others. We don't retaliate. We don't seek revenge. We practice patience and grace. Live so that others will glorify God.

**Treat others with love and respect.** Finally Peter says that because we are citizens of a heavenly kingdom, we should remember to love others and show respect. We do that first of all by choosing to live in submission or to live under the authority of human leaders. This includes the emperor who was in authority over the entire Roman empire, and the sub-regents – governors. (Surprising) He reminds us that human government is part of God's order for the world. Human government is there to hold all citizens accountable for their behavior and preserve order. It is likely that when Peter wrote this that the emperor was Nero. He was a vicious and cruel leader, and tradition tells us that Peter was put to death while Nero was on the throne. But Peter teaches that we should honor the emperor. Now Peter knew that if we came to a place where we had to choose to obey the

government, or to obey God, we should always choose God. But we can still be respectful of those in authority. He goes on by instructing us that we should further **respect everyone**. This will include all people. And we must **demonstrate love**, especially for brothers and sisters in the Church.

SO WHAT QUESTION:

- **Live a good life**
- **Live in such a way that others will be influenced to give glory to God**
- **Live your life treating others with respect and love**

So as we celebrate our anniversary as a nation, we who are followers of Jesus can choose to be good citizens of the nation. What do you give a Nation for a birthday present. You can give your good behavior and respect. You can give a good life to your nation. Godly people make good citizens.

**Prayer**