

## Introduction

### 2 Chronicles 7:14

God is the God of all nations, of all creation. We pray for our country not because we're special, and not over and against other nations, but because we love our country and believe ourselves to be "one nation, under God". This isn't about nationalism or exceptionalism; it's about praying that we might be blessed to be a blessing to the world. It's about expressing our gratitude for God's goodness, coming clean about our failures, and being sent out with renewed commitment to live well as citizens of the Kingdom and this great nation.

## Thanksgiving

### Psalm 33:12-22

There is, I believe, no better way to begin celebrating this weekend than with thanksgiving, specifically thanksgiving for this nation in which we live. Thanksgiving not only opens our eyes to the treasure that our country is; it raises our eyes to the One who has so richly blessed us as a nation.

Listen to our public discourse and you will discover that we too quickly focus on our problems and too quickly forget about our blessings. We see this in relationships all the time, don't we? We meet someone who has nothing kind to say about their spouse or their children, and then just a few moments later meet someone who can't stop talking about what a gift their family is. One makes for a miserable family; the other makes for a thriving family.

And the same is true, I believe, for nations. Like every nation we face challenges. We've fallen and we've failed. We'll get to some of those things today when we take time for confession. But that's not the place to begin. Not this weekend. Gratitude is. And we, as Americans, have so much to be grateful to God for. Let me name just a few.

How about the sheer beauty of this land? From the glaciers of Alaska, to the desert Southwest. From Rocky Mountains to deep woods. From deep blue lakes to flowing rivers and streams. From fertile plains to stunning coast lines. This nation is a feast for the eyes.

And then there's the sheer diversity of our population. America is still the Great Melting Pot. We are a people of many languages, many cultures, many artistic perspectives, many cuisines. Right in our own backyard you can have Swedish pancakes for breakfast, enchiladas for lunch and moo goo gai pan for dinner. Top it all off with some Dairy Queen soft serve. What's not to like?

I could go on and on about the things for which I'm grateful to God as an American, but on this weekend freedom tops my list. I get to worship here this morning without fear of persecution. I will get to have a voice in electing the leadership of this nation in November. I

could decide today to drive from here to Key West Florida without worrying about a single border crossing. Our freedom has been and continues to be secured at great cost, and it's a treasure beyond compare.

I've had the privilege of traveling to the Dominican Republic several times on mission trips with Prince of Peace. The Dominicans have a very interesting tradition. Whenever they fly and land back in the Dominican Republic, as soon as the wheels of the plain touch the ground they break out in thunderous applause, grateful to be home. I wonder if perhaps every day, when our feet touch the ground of this good land, we wouldn't do well to break into thunderous applause, giving thanks and praise to God who has blessed us so richly.

Prayers of Thanksgiving:

## Confession

### Isaiah 1:4, 16-17, 19-20

Brief Message: "With great power comes great responsibility" is a quote that's been attributed to people as diverse as Voltaire, Winston Churchill and Spiderman. It's a great quote and one that I would say is absolutely true. As citizens of the most powerful nation on the planet it's a quote worth reflecting on and living into.

Here's another related quote, "We are blessed to be a blessing". No question who that quote is from. It's from God. From the beginning of the biblical story God told Abraham that he would bless him as the father of a great nation, not just to be blessed but to be a blessing. In the Kingdom of God our lives were never meant to be stagnant pools into which God poured blessing. Our lives as individuals and as a nation are meant to be rivers through whom the blessings of God flows into the lives of others.

In today's scripture reading from Isaiah God is quite upset with his people. God had richly blessed the Israelites, but many who had been blessed hoarded those blessings for themselves. They turned a blind eye and a deaf ear to the suffering of others, especially the poor and the powerless. Listen again to God's Word:

*Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your doings from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow.*

While we have much to be thankful for in this nation we also have much to confess, much that breaks the heart of God. Let me share just a few troubling statistics:

An estimated 45 million Americans live in poverty, 25 million of them children.

There are approximately 1.5 million homeless Americans.

15 million children go to bed hungry in this America every day.

100,000 children each year in America are forced into prostitution. Racism, sexism and violence against women and children are on the rise in America.

How these issues are resolved is up for political debate. That they exist in the wealthiest and most powerful nation in the world is reason for deep shame. With great power comes great responsibility. Those who are blessed are called to be a blessing.

These are not issues “out there”. These are not someone else’s problems. The truth of the Gospel is that none of us can be whole and well until all of us are whole and well. As a nation we need to acknowledge our abuse and abandonment of the poor and the powerless among us. We are quick to blame them for their problems, but the prophets are speaking to us:

*Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your doings from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow.*

I don’t know what the answers to these problems are, but I do know what the first step is: heart-felt confession. Listen again to the words of 2 Chronicles 7:14, “*If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, pray, seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.*”

Let’s humble ourselves, seek God’s face in confession and for God’s forgiveness and restoration.

## **Sending**

### **1 Timothy 2:1-4**

I have hopes and dreams for my children. Hopes and dreams for their future, that they will thrive, find happiness, make a difference in the world. And if you have children or grandchildren, I’ll be you have hopes and dreams for them.

But how about for our nation? Do you have hopes and dreams for America? Hopes and dreams have power. They compel us forward. I think about Dr. Martin Luther King who gave voice to his dreams for America:

*“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.”*

What a beautiful dream!

And our forefathers had a dream for this nation. They had a dream that this would be a land in which all people would have the freedom to pursue life, liberty and happiness.

And I believe that God has a dream for this nation, just as God has a dream for all creation. A dream in which all people would love God and love their neighbor. A dream in which all people would know wholeness. A dream in which there is no more hunger, no more sadness, no more sickness, no more death. God’s dream is called The Kingdom of God.

But how about you? Do you have a dream for your country? Do you have a dream that God has planted in you for who we are to become as a nation? Because you are a citizen of this land, and because you are a citizen of the Kingdom of God, your dream matters. And so, I want to challenge you to give voice to your dream. In these next few moments I want to invite you to come forward and write your dreams on these blackboards, or at least give voice to your dream in prayer. And then, I want to send you out with prayer and a benediction – a word of sending, a promise of God-at-work in and through you in this nation that we love.