

A Vision of God's Justice 2021  
1 Peter 2:9-17

1 Peter 2:9-17 (New Revised Standard Version)

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. Beloved, I urge you as aliens and exiles to abstain from the desires of the flesh that wage war against the soul. Conduct yourselves honorably among the Gentiles, so that, though they malign you as evildoers, they may see your honorable deeds and glorify God when he comes to judge. For the Lord's sake accept the authority of every human institution, whether of the emperor as supreme, or of governors, as sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to praise those who do right. For it is God's will that by doing right you should silence the ignorance of the foolish. As servants of God, live as free people, yet do not use your freedom as a pretext for evil. Honor everyone. Love the family of believers. Fear God. Honor the emperor.

My favorite holiday when I lived in the Washington DC area  
was the July 4<sup>th</sup> celebration with the Beach Boys & others in concert  
on the Mall between the Washington Monument and Lincoln Memorial,  
followed by an awesome fireworks display in the evening.

It was a grand celebration often in excess of a million people,  
& always a wonderful, inspiring & very patriotic experience.  
There was a huge crowd, a mix of locals, tourists & internationals,  
and it was great fun to meet and talk with people I met there,  
especially foreign visitors trying to make sense of it all.

One year I happened to meet a young exchange student from Sweden,  
and as we talked and got better acquainted, she complained:  
that America seems to glorify violence and bloodshed,  
and that only Americans  
would make a holiday of declaring war against Great Britain.

I was a bit taken back and offended at first, but then I realized  
that she didn't understand our country or our patriotic fervor,  
and in particular, she didn't understand our July 4<sup>th</sup>  
or Declaration of Independence as a vision of hope.

As it happened, we were by the river along the Tidal Basin,  
walking along the pathway toward the Jefferson Memorial.  
Once we were inside, I pointed up to the first panel on the left  
where the preamble of The Declaration of Independence  
is engraved in bold gold letters on the white marble:

"We hold these truths to be self-evident that all men are created equal, that they are  
endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these rights are life, liberty  
and the pursuit of happiness, and that governments derive their just powers from the consent of  
the governed."

I explained to her that these words were not written  
as a declaration of violence and war against England,

but were intended to express their beliefs & longings,  
a vision of how a people wanted to live in freedom.

This is the context and moral background and ideal of our nation,  
what we believe, which contributed to who & what we try to be,  
all created equal, certain unalienable rights, endowed by the Creator.

These are the ideals of our nation, **the dream that binds us together**,  
and values which are derived from our shared belief and trust  
that we are Created by a God who cares about how we live,  
how we treat our neighbors & the justice we're to live by ...

...that everybody matters because we are all lovingly created,  
and uniquely one-of-a-kind blessed and gifted by God,  
**and if we think we're more important than someone else,  
we are wrong and that arrogance will lead toward evil.**

These declared values proclaim, **equality, justice and liberty**,  
and they are an idealistic hope, that represent a hunger & longing,  
a belief and conviction that something better is possible,  
**even though in the course of human history there had never been  
any place on earth where these truths were lived in practice.**

At the time when Jefferson wrote,  
almost every nation was ruled by a despot or a monarch,  
with power and control inherited as nobles at birth,  
with no sense of equality or any rights of the powerless.

Even within Jefferson's Virginia itself,  
there was little evidence of equality among the people,  
as slavery would still continue for another eighty years.

Jefferson's powerful and idealistic words of vision and hope  
were **a patriotic dream** that has still not yet been fully realized,  
**and that even today continues to test, elude and challenge us.**

As Martin Luther King pointed out in his 1963 "I have a dream" speech,  
In a sense we have come to our nation's capital to cash a check. When the architects of  
our republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of  
Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir.  
This note was a promise that all men, yes, black men as well as white men, would be  
guaranteed the unalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

It is obvious today that America has defaulted on this promissory note insofar as her  
citizens of color are concerned. Instead of honoring this sacred obligation, America has given  
... a bad check, a check which has come back marked "insufficient funds." But we refuse to  
believe that the bank of justice is bankrupt. We refuse to believe that there are insufficient funds  
in the great vaults of opportunity of this nation.

So we have come to cash this check -- a check that will give us upon demand the riches of freedom and the security of justice. ... Now is the time to make real the promises of democracy. Now is the time to rise from the dark and desolate valley of segregation to the sunlit path of racial justice. Now is the time to lift our nation from the quick sands of racial injustice to the solid rock of brotherhood. Now is the time to make justice a reality for all of God's children.

From the very beginning of this American experiment in democracy,  
there has been an understanding that having been blessed by God,  
we're called to live as God's people in a just & fair society,  
and that citizenship comes with rights & responsibilities.

A similar perspective is also expressed in 1<sup>st</sup> Peter, vs. 9-10, 16

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you **out of darkness into his marvelous light**.

Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. As servants of God, live as free people, yet do not use your freedom as a pretext for evil.

To be chosen, to be as we read, *God's own people and holy nation*,  
does not mean somehow more loved or better than other people.  
Rather, to be chosen, is to be called & equipped to serve God's purpose,  
as a people through whom the grace & justice of God can flow freely,  
based upon the idea, that God creates us all equally precious.

Chosen does not mean favored as in spared life's difficulties,  
but as entrusted in response to the grace and blessings of God,  
we're equipped to live out God's justice in the world, vs. 12, 15

Conduct yourselves honorably among the *Gentiles*, so that, though they malign you as evildoers, they may see your honorable deeds and glorify God when he comes to judge. For it is God's will that by doing right you should silence the ignorance of the foolish.

To be *God's own chosen people and holy nation*  
does not mean that we are or should feel superior in any way,  
but as individuals and as a nation we are challenged & commanded  
to reflect God's love and compassion toward **all** others. **Matt. 5:16**  
... let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

As Christians, as citizens and residents, as patriots  
we serve the interests of nation best **by letting our lives shine,**  
**by reflecting God's love, mercy and goodness before the world.**

God isn't calling Christians to a political world domination,  
but simply to live in the world as who we are,  
reflecting to whom we belong... which means  
to reflect God's love and grace toward all others,  
as evidence of God's call from darkness to light.

1<sup>st</sup> Peter was written in a time of state persecution, and obviously,  
the church/state concerns of those earliest Christians,  
were quite different than ours as Christians in America.

Many of the leaders involved with the founding of this nation,  
thought and believed their situation was comparable or analogous  
to the Israelites moving into the Promised Land,  
following God's will in forming the nation Israel.

All through the Old Testament, especially in Deuteronomy,  
God instructs and commands the people of Israel,  
in how they are to live as a people of God, a godly nation.

Moses outlines God's justice, the sort of place they are to be,  
and how their own experience as slaves back in Egypt,  
was to inform and guide their community life and values.

It meant that they were not to exploit or abuse the poor & powerless,  
but they were to remember what injustice feels like,  
and not to do to others in their land as had been done to them.

#### **And why not?**

Because all are loved and cherished by God their Creator,  
and how tragic if the formerly oppressed, becomes the oppressor.

The operative assumption of both Israel and our nation's founders  
was that having been blessed so abundantly & graciously by God,  
they were called from darkness to light, and entrusted  
to be and to live as God's own people and a holy nation.

Thomas Jefferson, in his second inaugural address of 1805,  
wrote and warned against abandoning that perspective & ideal.

His words are inscribed on the ceiling at the Jefferson Memorial:

"God gave us life and liberty. Can the liberties of a nation be secure when we have  
removed a conviction that these liberties are the gift of God? I tremble for my country when I  
reflect that God is just, and his justice cannot sleep forever."

Nation after nation, empire after empire has fallen,  
and this American experiment in democracy could fail too.  
Our nation could pass into the dustbin of history,  
if we are complacent and do not treasure who and what we are,  
and strive toward liberty, opportunity and justice for all.

I believe the 4<sup>th</sup> of July presents us with **the patriot's dilemma**:

1<sup>st</sup> to not so idealize our country as to make it a false idol,  
unable to hear and accept challenge and call to do better.

2<sup>nd</sup> AND not to so obsess with its flaws and deficiencies  
as to not see the good and noble, and try to do better.

The important consideration for the 4<sup>th</sup> of July is not  
to celebrate our battles and wars, or political movements

but to consider afresh our hope and dreams, our vision:  
as a nation that was built upon the dream and ideal,  
that we could live together in truth & justice as a community,  
**where all are uniquely created and equally loved by God.**

In a world that says that some are nobodies who don't really matter,  
**God disagrees –**  
for God calls us his own, and we are all somebodies who do matter,  
and so we are called & equipped to live in hope, peace & justice.

In the long run, nations and politics are comparatively unimportant,  
but as Christians we can do some good, strive toward real justice ...  
**... yet fully aware that what Jesus has accomplished  
matters so much more than anything we'll ever do.**

As a sign and symbol pointing toward God's gracious love and mercy  
we are blessed that the Lord's Table is where all are always welcome,  
& serves to remind us to love God completely & to love our neighbor.

We gather at his table for Jesus to feed us spiritually and graciously  
to be strengthened - and empowered, then to go back out,  
to serve in a corrupt world, one that is tainted by sin,  
**yet a world filled with people,  
all of whom God dearly loves.**