FAITH AND OUR NATION

ST. STEPHEN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH
JULY 5, 2026

MY COUNTRY, ‘TIS OF THEE

1 MY COUNTRY, 'TIS OF THEE,
SWEET LAND OF LIBERTY,
OF THEE I SING;
LAND WHERE MY FATHERS DIED,
LAND OF THE PILGRIM'S PRIDE,
FROM EVERY MOUNTAINSIDE
LET FREEDOM RING.

2 MY NATIVE COUNTRY, THEE,
LAND OF THE NOBLE FREE,
THY NAME I LOVE;
I LOVE THY ROCKS AND RILLS,
THY WOODS AND TEMPLED HILLS;
MY HEART WITH RAPTURE THRILLS
LIKE THAT ABOVE.

3 LET MUSIC SWELL THE BREEZE,
AND RING FROM ALL THE TREES
SWEET FREEDOM'S SONG;
LET MORTAL TONGUES AWAKE,
LET ALL THAT BREATHE PARTAKE,
LET ROCKS THEIR SILENCE BREAK,
THE SOUND PROLONG.

4 OUR FATHERS' GOD, TO THEE,
AUTHOR OF LIBERTY,
TO THEE WE SING;
LONG MAY OUR LAND BE BRIGHT
WITH FREEDOM'S HOLY LIGHT;
PROTECT US BY THY MIGHT,
GREAT GOD, OUR KING.

PRAYER FOR OUR COUNTRY

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 favor and glad to do thy will.

Bless our land with honorable industry, sound learning, and pure manners.

Save us from violence, discord, and confusion;
from pride and arrogance, 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.

BCP, P. 820

FOR THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES AND ALL IN CIVIL AUTHORITY

O Lord our Governor, whose glory is in all the world:
We commend this nation to thy merciful care, that, being guided by thy Providence, we may dwell secure in thy peace.

Grant to the President of the United States, the Governor of this State (or Commonwealth), and to all in authority, wisdom and strength to know and to do thy will.

Fill them with the love of truth and righteousness, and make them ever mindful of their calling to serve this people in thy fear;

through Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Spirit, one God, world without end. Amen.

BCP, P. 820

FOR THOSE IN THE ARMED FORCES OF OUR COUNTRY

Almighty God, we commend to your gracious care and keeping all the men and women of our armed forces at home and abroad.

Defend them day by day with your heavenly grace;
strengthen them in their trials and temptations;
give them courage to face the perils which beset them;
and grant them a sense of your abiding presence wherever they may be;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

BCP, P. 823

DISCUSSION

What does it mean to love our country?

What does it mean to be patriotic?

How does this connect with or contradict our love of God in Christ?

CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM

Sociological definition:

a cultural framework — a set of assumptions and myths — that idealizes and advocates a fusion of American civic life with a particular kind of Christian identity, often including assumptions about national chosenness, traditional family structures, patriarchy, and racial hierarchy.

The Episcopal Church's working definition:

a commitment to combining Christian and American identities, demanding that Christianity receive special treatment by the state, and treating the United States as an inherently Christian nation.

Where is the line between religiously motivated citizenship and "our country and our faith" are the same thing?

OUR FOUNDERS' BELIEFS

- ☑ No single national church should be established
- ☑ Religious liberty was a natural right, not a government grant — belief could not be legislated or coerced
- ☑ Public virtue mattered to a republic, and religion was widely seen as a useful — even necessary — support for that virtue, whatever one's private theology
- ☑ None claimed to be founding an explicitly "Christian nation" in the constitutional sense

DISCUSSION

Where have you seen the line between faithful citizenship and Christian nationalism blurred — in the church, in the media, or in your own thinking?

The Prayer Book prays for "sound government" and for those who hold authority, regardless of party. What would it look like to pray that way sincerely for leaders you disagree with?

Is there a practice our parish could take up together as a way of living out faithful citizenship?