

“July 4th Joy In The Midst Of America’s Trials!”

2 Corinthians 8:1–12; Lamentations 3:22–33; Mark 5:24b–34

Back in 1969-1971, some of you may remember a show on TV entitled “**Hee Haw**” which featured guitarists **Roy Clark & Buck Owens** and a cast of actors/ country hillbilly singers. One their songs that got a lot of mileage from each weekly show had these lyrics:

*Gloom, despair, and agony on me Deep, dark depression, excessive misery
If it weren't for bad luck, I'd have no luck at all, Gloom, despair, and agony on me.*

No matter if or what you remember from that program and its performers, all of us can agree that as we celebrate the 4th of July this weekend, America has been exceptionally blessed. We are the most powerful and prosperous nation in the world. Can we / should we, as Christians, thank God for the United States of America? Absolutely we should as the Psalmist does in Ps. 107: **Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever. Let the redeemed of the LORD say this—those he redeemed from the hand of the foe, those he gathered from the lands, from east and west, from north and south.** (Ps 107:1–3).

As Americans, we give thanks to God for a heritage of faith that has been passed down through the generations. We read about the faith of godly men and women in our country’s history. Some of the Founding Fathers were Christian. They believed in the Good News of Jesus Christ. They confessed that he died on the cross for our sins and rose again for our justification. These men and women, and millions of their fellow citizens, prayed for their nation and the future of their country. They witnessed to the next generation and we are by-products of those answered prayers and their witness.

But at the same time, it seems lately we are experiencing our share of dark depression and excessive misery in what is happening in America. Citizens are scratching their heads wondering what is going on in our country. It’s not enough that we have worldly enemies who want to destroy us. But America seems to be destroying itself in some respects and going through severe trials.

So do we stop celebrating Independence Day? Not at all, because 100’s of 1,000 of men & women have spilled their blood on the battlefields of our history to allow us to sit here in church today to worship when we want and whom we want. Let us take some morsels out of all 3 of our readings today and find:

“July 4th Joy In The Midst Of America’s Trials!”

1. We find the country seemingly out of control
2. We know the God who really is in control

1

The growing trials of America make up the daily menu of news. We hear the reports so many times everyday that we wonder if **our country is seemingly out of control**. Violent crimes continue to affect many communities. Police officers are shot in cold blood or in the line of duty just for doing their job. *(Yes, some go over the line, but that’s not the majority of them.)* Schools now need security cameras, locked doors, and metal detectors to check for weapons. Our country is constantly threatened in oversea conflicts, but the growing concern now is **ISIS recruitment and terrorism** right here at home. Politicians in office and many seeking the highest office of presidency address our country’s trials with rousing rhetoric and promises which they can’t keep. You can consider yourself most blessed if a loved one has not given in to the temptation of illegal drugs or alcohol or any other of the countless addictions that plague our society.

And now who among us has not watched in frustration as **the very Biblical definition of marriage** which God instituted as being the union of a man and a woman has now been crumbled and redefined under political & social pressures by a ruling of the Supreme Court? These are indeed trying times and who knows what the future holds as conservative churches that stay true to God’s Word are pressured, if not threatened to conduct same-sex marriages in their midst. Even our Synod has now released a policy statement on this issue for our fellow congregations to consider and adopt in the event they are approached. **I’ve directed our Coordinating Council** to review this statement and make the necessary revisions so that there will be no such same-sex services on St. Peter soil. We must make a clear confession of God’s truth.

In light of our nation’s trials, God’s people may well be lifting their hands and hearts to the heavens saying, *“Lord, these must be the last days. Things cannot get much more out of control before you return in judgment!”* It is just as Peter writes in his 2nd letter, chapter 3: **First of all you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires.** (2 Pet 3:3)

Can it get any worse? We need only look at the Book of Lamentations to see how bad it can get. God rained down judgment upon His people and priests who ignored his pleas for repentance through prophets rejected by the people. God used the invading Babylonians in 586 BC to destroy Jerusalem, **purge** his land from idolatrous practices, and **scourge** the kings who had trusted in

military might instead of the God of their father David. That wasn't bad luck. That was God, calling his people to repentance of their sins.

We may have personal problems more pressing than our nation's trials. You may feel that it can't get any worse. **Look at Jairus' little girl** in our Gospel reading. We don't know her name, but she was critically ill and soon died. What parent wants to see his child/grandchild die before him? But she did and Jairus' life seemed completely out of control.

Even in the Church, Paul tells in our Epistle how the new congregations of Macedonia suffered through severe trials and extreme poverty. Admittedly, our Church has challenges: **a budget in the red**, difficulty with mission manpower, and Synodically a serious shortage of workers after the baby boom retirements begin in the next 3-5 years.

With a country seemingly out of control, and the church seriously challenged from within and without, where's **the joy this 4th of July**? How can anyone take seriously the encouragement of Scripture to "**Be joyful always?**" (1 Thess 5:16) Our sin puts us before God as lost & condemned creatures. Our resistance to His will has long taxed God's patience. His judgment is upon us and every soul who has sinned. We deserve nothing from God's but an everlasting sentence in hell. The Bible says: **ALL HAVE SINNED AND FALL SHORT OF THE GLORY OF GOD**. The reality is we are all out of control with God and taken the plunge from His glory & holiness!

2

But enough of all this gloom, despair, and sorrow! There is good news. **There is July 4th JOY because we know the GOD WHO REALLY IS IN CONTROL.**

When Jeremiah surveyed Jerusalem and the destruction, he could still say, "**Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning, great is your faithfulness. The Lord is good those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him. It is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord...For men are not cast off by the Lord forever. Though he brings grief, he will show compassion, so great is his unfailing love.**" (Lam 3:22-26,31-32)

Jeremiah knew that **God was really in control**, and because the Lord is in control over time and history, there is hope. This is the Good News to which we Christians cling when we see our country torn apart by sin and when we feel ourselves beginning to drift with it. **Christians turn back to Jesus Christ**, the Savior of the world who endured the worst of trials of the weight of our sins and the judgment of God instead of us. He has forgiven our sins, washed them away clean, and given us the faith by the Spirit to know **the God who is really in control**. **We know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes, he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.** (2 Cor 8:9)

Jesus Christ is the one who shattered the power of sin, silenced the devil and defeated death. Look what He did with Jairus' 12 yr old daughter: **He took her by the hand and said to her, Talitha koum (little girl I say to you, get up) Immediately the girl stood up and walked around.** (Mk 5:41-42) The Son of God is really in control because He suffered, died, and rose again from the grave. He is our Risen Redeemer **who holds all things in His hands**: our country, our lives, our souls, until he calls us home to Himself in heaven.

In the meantime, whether in our country or in our lives, there will be trials. Jesus once said: **In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.** (Jn 16:33b). To you who are saddened and concerned by the trials of America, Jesus says, **Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.** (Jn 14:27)

Let there be joy on this 4th of July weekend as we remember our nation's 239th birthday. And in spite of its trials seemingly **throwing it out of control**, we rejoice that **we know the Lord God who is really in control**. May He be with our country and continue to bless America as we live in its freedoms everyday until we reach **that sweet & blessed country, the home of God's elect!**
AMEN