

Sermon for Sunday, July 4, 1971 by Andrew A. Jumper, D.D., Pastor  
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"CELEBRATING THE FOURTH AND TAKING THE FIFTH"  
Acts 13:14-43

Text: "When they were still living as aliens in Egypt he made them into a nation and brought them out..." Acts 13:17

Let me begin by saying that some might be misled by the sermon title this morning and think that this is a temperance sermon. For those of you who have a one-track mind let me remind you that there is another kind of fifth--and in this case, it is the fifth amendment to the Constitution that I have in mind. In recent years we have seen investigative bodies interrogating persons about certain activities, only to have those persons refuse to answer on the grounds that their answer might incriminate them--a right that each person has under the fifth amendment that he does not have to testify against himself or provide information that might tend to incriminate him. Unfortunately, there are those who are using the protections this great government provides in order to destroy it.

Let me remind you of a little history this morning. In the months during which the Constitutional Convention was going on, the delegates to the convention brought their own provincial ambitions, their own selfish desires, their own greedy self-interests, to the conference table. The yankees argued for yankee advantages, the southerners argued for southern interests. They shouted, threatened, shook their fists, argued, and blamed one another. Yet, when they had finished their work, they had produced the freest and most creative government in human history. As one writer has put it, "the venture almost failed and it was not until men rose above state and local considerations and winged their way above the swamp mists of self-interest that the seeds of true liberty were free to take root and sprout." He went on to add, "Not until the great idea defeated a thousand trivial ones did men begin to feel the thrill of calling themselves by a new name, Americans."

J. Edgar Hoover, Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, wrote of those courageous men of 1776 in these words, "We owe a great debt to our Founding Fathers who were willing to sacrifice all for the right to establish a system of self-government in which men and women would have a choice and a part. Because of their valiant efforts, today we live in a nation which offers its citizens more equality, more justice, more freedom, and a greater opportunity to pursue happiness than ever provided by any other system in recorded history."

Yet, today as we are celebrating the fourth, there are far too many among us who are taking the fifth. Today we are being treated to the spectacle of dissidents who unlawfully force their wills upon the majority; our system is being abused by those who get what they want and do as they please without regard for the rights of others; liberty is being treated as license to choose which laws will be obeyed and which will be ignored. As we celebrate the fourth this morning while some take the fifth, there are others of us who are sick to death of the destruction that undermines our national foundations without offering constructive alternatives. Millions of people today live under oppressive and tyrannical governments who long for a chance to live in a land such as ours which provides the ideals and principles of self-government.

I am reminded of a modern parable that goes like this: "Once upon a time in a kingdom long ago and far away it happened that, after the grain crop had been harvested and stored, it was discovered to be poisoned. Anyone who ate of it went insane. The king and his advisors immediately took counsel as to what should be done. Clearly, from other sources not nearly enough food was available to sustain the populace; there was no choice but to eat the grain. 'Very well,' said the king, 'let

us eat it; but at the same time we must feed a few people on a different diet so that there will be among us some who remember that we are crazy." Our forefathers had a vision whereby the only means a free people should use to resolve differences and effect changes was through lawful process. As we look at what is happening and what is being done to our government today, what we need most of all is some among us who remember that we are absolutely crazy.

We are crazy when a black named Jonathan Jackson walks into a San Rafael courtroom where Angela Davis is being tried in a fair court under the fair and lawful process of the land and announces, "Excuse me, gentlemen, I'm taking over now." And then proceeds to murder a judge in cold blood.

We are crazy when a major denomination such as the United Presbyterian Church contributes \$25,000 for bail and legal aid to a Black Panther arrested in New York. We are crazy when that same denomination gives \$10,000 to the Angela Davis Defense Fund on the grounds that it is a "contribution to Christianity and to justice, and not to black militancy and communism." when Angela Davis has made it clear she is both.

We are crazy when every professional bleeding heart flies to the assistance of every far-out idea or militant anarchist around.

We are crazy when on the one hand we create special programs for those who fail, urging them toward initiative and personal effort, yet on the other hand rewarding irresponsibility.

We are crazy when we are ashamed of our great wealth and power and blame the failure of the many on the fault of the few who do succeed. And whether we work or loaf, cooperate or rebel, try hard or not at all, we now feel every person has the right to an income of at least \$4,000 a year, with a modern home, car, television and all the rest. We say that this nation owes this much to its people. And while this is happening, we are seeing the death of the free enterprise system as it gives way to an Americanized form of socialism.

The social patterns that have characterized our nation for many years are rapidly giving way today to new forms and maybe they should. But if those forms were not good enough to continue, surely we are crazy when new forms place power in the hands of those who are not yet able to use it wisely and well.

In 1971 as we are celebrating the fourth and taking the fifth, we need to ask ourselves what is wrong with our country; what is wrong with our nation; what is wrong with our people? I would like to suggest to you this morning that the problem with all of their complex facets that face our nation today grow out of one great issue. That issue is this: As a nation we have lost our relationship to God.

Do you remember the speech Benjamin Franklin made during one stage of the Constitutional Convention? He said, "In this situation of the assembly, groping as it were in the dark to find political truth and scarce able to distinguish it when presented to us, how has it happened, sir, that we have not hitherto once thought of humbly applying to the Father of lights to illuminate our understanding? In the beginning of the contest with Great Britain, when we were sensible of danger, we had daily prayer in this room for divine guidance...Our prayers, sir, were heard, and they were graciously answered...Have we now forgotten that powerful Friend? Do we imagine that we no longer need His assistance? I have lived, sir, a long time, and the longer I live, the more convincing proof I see of this truth--that God governs in the affairs of men. And if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without His notice

is it probable that an empire can rise without His aid? We have been assured, sir, that except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain who build it. I firmly believe this and I also believe that without His concurring aid we shall succeed in this political building no better than the builders of Babel..."

As a consequence of that speech, the Constitutional Convention opened each day in prayer and immediately the building of a new nation went smoothly ahead. Our founding fathers did indeed discover that if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without God's notice, an empire could not rise without his aid.

Are the problems we face today any less great? No, if anything they are greater. If an empire could not rise without His aid, is it likely that it can continue to stand without his continuing aid? So at heart the problem that faces America is a moral problem--a problem of man's relationship to God.

Today as we celebrate the birthday of our nation, we desperately need a return to God. And we must begin with ourselves. As our nation is increasingly drifting away from any religious moorings, it is not enough to cry out against the immorality of our day. It is not enough to decry and deplore. Rather, we must begin in our own homes and in our own lives to be a God-fearing, Christ-centered people. We must become again a people who dare to put duty and responsibility first ahead of our own selfish desires and pleasures. There can be no moral fiber, no moral backbone to a nation whose families are not willing to pay the price of moral responsibility and faithfulness to God. We must regain a certain toughness about ourselves that rejects easy self-indulgency in the knowledge that there are no easy answers, no free answers, to the moral dilemma of our time.

In order for there to be a return to God, what this nation must have is a group of high and holy people who lead the way for the nation in putting their trust in him. That means that there must be denominations and there must be individual congregations who believe the Word of God, who trust in Jesus Christ, who feel a moral responsibility for the way they live, who in their homes are communicating their faith to the youth of those homes and who are teaching them moral responsibility. Above all, we need homes where men and women are not ashamed to be Americans. And while our nation is surely not perfect, she is the freest and the greatest government that human minds and hearts have ever devised.

If this empire arose in prayer, then surely this nation is indeed under God. I God does indeed govern in the affairs of men then it follows as the night the day that he has had a hand in the creation of this nation. That does not mean our nation is always right, but it does mean that she can never be right unless she is standing under God. The hope, then, for a nation that is celebrating the fourth and taking the fifth is for a holy people to arise who under God dare to call him blessed for the gift of our nation; it is for a holy people who put their trust in him without reservation, without shame, without pretension, without equivocation.

For such a people to arise, there must be churches where God is truly worshipped and honored, where the Bible is held in reverence and holy awe, where Jesus is truly preached. As we look at the apostasy of the churches today and of denominations, I know not what course others shall take. But as for me and my house, we shall strive to be faithful to Him who has called us out of darkness into his marvelous light.

Let us not be ashamed of being Christians who trust in God and who believe that he created our nation. Let us not be ashamed of our flag which we, above any nation have endued with more than patriotism for it is a symbol of a nation under God. Today as we celebrate the fourth of July, our national birthday, let us leave this place with a solemn vow and affirmation, that we shall live as Christian men who are morally responsible and that under God we will be proud to be Americans.