



As the first continental congress in 1776 was getting down to work, they were about to make a certain declaration you may have heard of in the last few days. Battles were raging in Boston and in other places and encircling on there in the streets of Philadelphia. But to do their work, the congress thought it well before they began to have a prayer. John Adams was leading the proceedings, raised a Congregationalist turned Unitarian. After letting go of what he would fondly call superstition, he didn't know what to do. We've got Episcopalians, and Baptists, and Quakers, and Presbyterians and Congregationalists, oh my.

Luckily, John's cousin Samuel, Sam Adams, also known more for his lager perhaps than his politics. You might put it up against some Belgian beers here and there. But he piped up as they were talking about how to pray and he said, "I'm no bigot." Yeah. And he said he'd hear a prayer from anyone, and I quote, "of piety and virtue who was at the same time a friend of this country." So they got the closest minister they could find, a priest from the Church of England. Why not? The Reverend Jacob Duche. And after, Duche read the day's psalm, Duche prayed to the congress. And according to Adams, "filled the bosom of every man present." Then went on to say, "I must confess, I never heard a better prayer or one so well pronounced." Once a Unitarian, always a nerd. That's okay.

And then congress agreed unanimously on something for the first and the last time in the history of the congress. No, that's not really true. There's three things that have been unanimous. They signed the Declaration of Independence and launched, they did, upon the world, the great experiment in self-governance we fight to protect every living day. And fight we must, friends.

Daniel's reading, actually hearing it took me back to January when this church made it possible for me and many clergy to travel to Minneapolis to take part in coordinated resistance, and to learn more about the fascist takeover of a city and how those resilient people responded and organized. I was there in the wake of the shooting of Rene Good and before the execution of Alex Pretti. We underwent training, we took part in community and neighborhood surveillance, and we joined in an action at the airport where private companies were profiting from transporting residence of Minneapolis to places around the world after they were apprehended in warrant-less searches and seizures, where in some cases, the stated only predicate for probable cause was the color of the person's skin. The same thing is happening now actually at our airports here in North Texas, according to the Baptist News Global.

The protest had visiting clergy in in it, it had local clergy. There were union members there because some of the people kidnapped were actually members of the union servicing the airport. And other citizens of the city. It was -45 degrees. That is not with the windchill, that was the temperature. We wore layers upon layers and kept as much of our skin as we could unexposed to the elements. I still suffered frostbite here on my hand from taking images and video with my phone while I was there. We have one of them here for you to see.

*Everybody's got a right to live.*

*Everybody's got a right to live.*

*And before this campaign fails,*

*We'll all go down to jail.*

*Everybody's got a right to live.*

*Everybody's got a right to live.*

*Everybody's got a right-*

A few minutes after that, they backed up a bus and more than 100 clergy were zip-tied by their hands and led into that bus. There were dozens of different faiths, a lot of Unitarians. They were taken into custody for that action there at the airport. They were frostbitten and aching, kneeling in that weather for an hour. It was not for the faint of heart or for the spirit, and they were filled with piety and virtue and were each, too, a person, a friend of this country.

They were friends of this country like the kinds of friends this country needs right now. The ones that tell us when the country is making a mistake. The ones that tell us we need to consider a new course in our lives. Because someone told me once when in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them to another and to assume, among the powers of the Earth, the separate and equal station to which the laws of

nature and the natures God entitle them. A decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

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, are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. That to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the government. That whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it.

These are the opening words of the Declaration of Independence signed in 1776. If you keep reading, you'll find a lot of fine words about community. A whole lot of complaining, child. But in it, you will not find any reference to the United States being a Christian nation. Or even one created by any supernatural entity. The phrase and it's so beautiful, used in the document is nature's God, not super-nature God.

When it is said that this is a Christian nation, when I think many people, what they are saying is that it is a white nation. Because for many years, Christian and white were synonymous in this country and I think for some, they still are. This nation was governed first by people who labored under the false and dangerous myth that a single genetic expression in your skin endows you with some kind of special power, it makes you superior to others, maybe even by divine right.

And as it happened, because many of those same people in that room who governed this nation governed their own affairs at home under the title master. 41. 41 of the 56 signers of the Declaration were enslavers, friends. A small minority were ardent abolitionists, like our Unitarian friend John Adams. But many of those signers had a lot of economic reasons to sign that document for doing what they did. But despite that foundational difference, perhaps in their motivations, signing that Declaration of Independence for all of them was part of the common peril they faced from a king and it was tantamount to signing their own death warrants.

The British campaign to quash rebellion was ruthless. But the signers knew they needed to get the copies of what they had done there in that room out to the public and they knew the right person for the task. Mary Katharine Goddard is the sole woman whose name appears on many of the first copies of the Declaration of Independence because she was the most sought-after publisher in the colonies of anti-British rule material. She also had the dual-distinction of being the postmaster in Baltimore. Her father created the colonial postal system, which was founded in protest over the British surveillance of the colonial mail. They were literally opening the mail. Today, that system goes by the name you might recognize, the US Post Office.

With plenty of fear, but in light of this momentous occasion, and in the sight of her brethren who affixed and signed their own full names to this document, she chose also to sign her full name to the document instead of M. K. Goddard, as she had done. She signed the copy Mary Katharine Goddard and with that work standing squarely in sight of this British campaign against insurrection, she also became the first female employee of the federal government.

Yeah. Just wait. She wasn't done. If you don't take anything else from this sermon, please hear this. That the first act of the first female employee of the federal government was to dare the most powerful nation on Earth to come and get her if they dare. They declined.

So what do we do today? What do we do today when, in the course of human events, a government poses a danger to our loved ones, poses a danger to us? Those here, right here in our church. Shuttering healthcare facilities in rural America, where the oldest and the poorest people in this country do live. Because of shrinking Medicare and Medicaid reimbursements, that's a threat. Not signing one of the most comprehensively agreeable housing bills in modern history of our government that would at least begin to address this housing affordability crisis in this nation, consistently the most expensive part of almost every family budget, that's a threat. And ending the right to have a prayer of asylum heard and adjudicated fairly and impartially, that, you better believe is a threat. Not to mention rounding up people by the thousands, again, without regard to the due process of law.

These are threats worth our protest, but they are also something else. They are an answer. They help us answer this important question. Because I can read the Bible just like anybody else, and there ain't no way in Hell, a place that makes the sick sicker, the poor poorer and the stranger in even more danger is any kind of Christian nation I ever heard of.

Jesus was a walking, talking source of free universal healthcare, people. Not to mention a source of bread, and fish and a lot of wine. He could get down at a wedding. I'm going to get in trouble. It's all right. So if you hear people out there calling this a Christian nation and you're choking off mercy and healing for the elderly, the sick and the poor, I pray for you, friend. I am praying for you. After all, praying for this country is in our DNA.

And the moment Samuel Adams declared he was no bigot, that the spirit and virtue of the person praying was what mattered more than their doctrine into the story of the founding of this nation was sown, the very fiber of its being, and it is this. A plural society governed by consent dedicated to the unalienable right of all to the life, liberty and pursuit of happiness. The very person who intoned that prayer personified the worst of these founders' grievances, a state religion controlled by a king, and yet the prayer not the person is what carried that day. Keep praying, indeed, my friends.

And a quarter millennium later, how soon they forget. There are people out there I think who really want a king. I think they'd let it happen. Really. Will people really look the other way over and over when a leader enriches himself by billions using the power of their office? Will people stand by while free and fair elections are cast aside with the use of federal intimidation and force?

Well, the fact is, most of the signers of that document we celebrate today enriched themselves by stolen labor and would not have dreamed that everyone endowed with the divine right to life, liberty and pursuit of happiness actually meant everybody. Luckily, Audre Lorde lived and breathed and spoke, and she said this. "Without community, there is no liberation, only the most vulnerable and temporary armistice between an individual and her oppression." And she said, "The master's tools

will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change."

The genuine change that came to the first colonies was launched with a prayer up from the streets of Philadelphia that filled the bosom of the friends of this country. It was not perfect, falling as it did upon the ears of enslavers in the land of the free and the home of the brave. But the prayer in the heart of our Unitarian leader in that room where it happened came true in some ways so that the consent of the govern remains at the heart of how we select leaders in this country and is suffused into the very fabric of this faith, of a democratic spirit enlivening all that we do in this faith and in these churches.

And when, in the course of human events, another dares to become a king in these lands, this prayer must, it must, it must rise in the heart and in the voice of this nation once more. A prayer that lived in acts of protest, like this nation's first female employee who risked death, signed her warrant to speak truth and publish it to power. A prayer that lived in acts of protest like the ministers in Minneapolis, ministers and people of good faith throughout time who said, "Before we let this fail, we'll all go down to jail," and they did. A prayer alive in the songs we hear today and the hope we know in the hearts of good people and of good conscience who are all friends of this country.

But the prayer that was launched upon this nation by the dawn of its earliest light fades now for many and dims in the fell corners of fear and paranoia that strike deep, strike deep in the heart. Would-be kings and their court jesters who rely on these rusted tools of impunity, scorn and fear that built the master's house cannot be allowed to stay in it, cannot be allowed to succeed. Though they may prosper now, fate may stall them, but it takes acts of protest embodied in this faith and in many faiths to secure and defend the liberty of our nation.

This nation's very first prayer was literally on record against bigotry. Was literally one where our unity of purpose and diversity of thought were one and the same. So anyone who says you have to think like they do, anyone who says you have to pray like they do, anyone who says you got to love like they do, believe like they do, talk like they do, look like they do does not know the first thing or the first prayer about this country. Hear me, people. And hey, have forgotten, they have forgotten the foundational prayer that we are different and that's what makes us strong.

From the dawn of our nation, our faith founded in freedom of thought and love of this nation and its promise has been in the bosom of some of the most consequential people in our history who more than self, their country loved and mercy more than might. That is the prayer in each of our own hearts, friends. We will not let it die in us. That is the prayer in this church, friends. We will not let it die here. It should be the prayer of this nation and we shall not let it die there. It must live into the future to see faith help each of us to build a new house, a new way of living, a new life, a real liberty and the pursuit of happiness at last and truly for everybody. I pray this for you, I pray this for me, I pray this for our nation. And amen.

