

HEARTBEATS Staying Connected 4/19/2024

Dear Friends in CHRIST,

Sandy and I visited Colonial Williamsburg, Jamestown, and Yorktown on our recent vacation. The Jamestown fort and the nearby ships reflect the time period of the first English colony in America in 1609. Colonial Williamsburg shows life in the one-time capital of Virginia two years before the Revolutionary War broke out. Yorktown is the site of the Battle of Yorktown and the surrender of British General Lord Cornwallis to American General George Washington, ending the War for Independence. We enjoyed immersing ourselves in so much history. Many of those who came to America did so because of the desire for religious freedom. Even the colonists from England who founded the Jamestown colony had to swear before they left England to support the supremacy of the King against the power of the Pope. In other parts of the first colonies, Anglicans, Puritans, Quakers, Baptists, Congregationalists, Lutherans, Pietists, Methodists, and others came seeking freedom to worship as they choose and not as their home country or neighbors from other traditions demanded.

Today in the United States we are seeing an increase in Christian nationalism. Christian nationalism believes that the United States is defined by Christianity and that the government should work to maintain Christianity as the guide for our country. Christian Nationalism emphasizes that the United States is and must remain a “Christian nation.” While many Christian nationalists accept the First Amendment which states that the government may not promote one religion over others, Christian nationalism encourages a privileged position for Christianity in our country.

There are some problems with Christian nationalism. First, many Christian nationalists claim that the founding fathers created the United States as a Christian nation. Evangelicals will even say that the founding fathers were born-again Christians. However, while there were Christians among those who created our founding documents, the founding fathers did not intend to establish a Christian nation. Instead, they incorporated Christian values into our founding documents. Specifically, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, and George Washington appear to have believed in GOD but were skeptical about the deity of JESUS CHRIST. They valued the principles taught by JESUS but did not mean for the United States to have Christianity as the “law of the land” as it were.

Today, some emphasize Christianity in America to the point where other religions are suppressed. Some would even have Christianity become the national religion. First, that again contradicts why many came to America—to have the freedom to worship as they chose or not. The elevation of Christianity over other belief systems violates that First Amendment right to freedom of religion. Second, while as Christians, we might like to see our religious beliefs have priority over others, perhaps even to the exclusion of others, what form of Christianity do we want? There are many variations of Christianity in our country. Even within the Lutheran Church, there are more than forty different branches. What if a specific form of Christianity but not Lutheranism became the established religion? Might you one day consider leaving this country to go to another place to have the freedom to worship as you choose?

We are blessed to live in a country where we are free to choose the religious practices we wish to follow. We are blessed to live in a country that follows values consistent with the Bible. While we are

encouraged to share our faith with others, let us also recognize the right of each individual to choose how they will live out their beliefs.

In CHRIST's love,
Pastor Jeffrey