

Meditation: AMERICA, THE BEAUTIFUL

In 2007, our son David and his two sons, Paul and John, took a car trip across the country and north into Canada from their North Carolina home. They took hundreds of pictures and David wrote a prolific online journal extolling the beauty of what they saw. They all acknowledge God as the Creator of the universe, so a lot of praise ascended from them to God as they traveled. Our country IS beautiful, no doubt about it!

One of my favorite songs during my growing up years was “America, The Beautiful.” Listen to the first verse:

O beautiful for spacious skies,
For amber waves of grain;
For purple mountain majesties
Above the fruited plain!
America! America! God shed his grace on thee,
And crown thy good with brotherhood
From sea to shining sea.

To this day when I hear the phrase “for amber waves of grain” an image from 1942 of my dad’s wheat field flashes into my mind. We only lived on the farm one year and I was only 9 years old. I marvel at two things: the power of imagery in the written word and the ability of the brain to store and recall memories. Awesome!

In my earlier years, when I sang the chorus “America, America, God shed his grace on thee and crown thy good with brotherhood...” I thought it meant that God had by his grace made our country special, a place where goodwill and brotherhood reigned. Later on I saw it as a prayer that God would bless this good country with brotherhood. Something about both interpretations did not quite seem right to me. In 2001 I was surprised to find a song about nations in the Methodist hymnal that finally resonated with me. Here are the words of “This Is My Song”:

This is my song, O God of all the nations,
a song of peace for lands afar and mine.
This is my home, the country where my heart is;
here are my hopes, my dreams, my holy shrine:
but other hearts in other lands are beating
with hopes and dreams as true and high as mine.

My country’s skies are bluer than the ocean,
and sunlight beams on cloverleaf and pine;
but other lands have sunlight too, and clover,
and skies are everywhere as blue as mine.
O hear my song, thou God of all the nations,
a song of peace for their land and for mine.

This is my prayer, O Lord of all earth’s kingdoms:
Thy kingdom come, on earth, thy will be done;
Let Christ be lifted up ’til all shall serve him,
and hearts united learn to live as one:
O hear my prayer, thou God of all the nations,
myself I give thee; let thy will be done.

I agree that we need to look beyond our country's borders not only to appreciate, but also to pray for all nations and all people everywhere. The same bloodline runs through everyone; we are related to all human beings, no matter what their nationality. There are no perfect people, however, and there is no perfect nation. In these troubled times we need the perspective that another poet expressed in his hymn, "This Is My Father's World": "O let me ne'er forget that though the wrong seems oft so strong, God is the Ruler yet!"

Song Credits:

"America, The Beautiful" – Katharine Lee Bates, 1913.

"This Is My Song" – penned in 1934 by Lloyd Stone to the tune of Jean Sibelius' Finlandia. The final verse was added in 1939 by Georgia Harkness. The song is sometimes called "A Song of Peace."

"This Is My Father's World" – Maltbie D. Babcock, 1901.

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