

**THE PRAYER THAT FORGED A NATION**  
**Fourth of July Weekend –July 1, 2012 – James 5: 13-18 –Communion**  
**The Church of the Covenant**

We've been through 30 years of "de-mythologizing" our nation's history, of saying what it is NOT, of deconstructing all the stories we remember and were taught as children about the founders of our Republic. Certain secular historians from the 60's have said –"Well, this is questionable, and that cannot be proven, and that obviously was a made up story, a myth". On this Fourth of July Sunday I want to RE-CONSTRUCT the Father of our Nation, George Washington. People who want to re-write history want to re-write and deny the fact that we were founded as a Christian nation and founded as a nation by Christians and take that fact out of the history books. Yes, I want us to remember him as a man of great purpose and ability, who was able to forge our nation. But I also want us to remember him as a man of great Christian faith, a man of prayer, and a man whose prayer to Almighty God, at the lowest ebb of the Revolutionary War, saved the nascent nation. At Valley Forge, it was George Washington's prayer that became...THE PRAYER THAT FORGED A NATION...

I commend to you the recent book by Presbyterian Peter Lilbach, entitled *Sacred Fire*. Dr. Lilbach, by the way, is coming to Washington on September 29<sup>th</sup> to speak to us about the Christian roots of America. How's that for being providential? --A talk on George Washington at the George Washington Hotel in Washington County, in the city of Washington, PA???? How "Washington" is that? But Lilbach's point is to reconstruct the faith of George Washington and to point out how central was that faith to the founding of our country. Secularists want us to forget who we are and whose we are and the part the Lord God Almighty played in our founding. But on this Fourth of July Weekend, I want us to remember.

The time is 1776 and the Continental Army has lost just about every skirmish it has had with the British. We have been kicked out of New York, Washington has lost Long Island. Our troops have had a thrashing across the colony of New Jersey, from one end to the other. They made a stand to defend the nation's then capitol of Philadelphia, and again were beaten at Brandywine. Ignominiously, the Continental Congress had to flee its first capitol. The British troops are ensconced in the welcome of the Tories of Philadelphia, the nation's largest city, where they plan to spend a warm and convivial winter barracked in the finest homes. By contrast, the Continental Army is encamped outside Philadelphia at Valley Forge. They have no housing, little supplies, no warm clothing. They had begun the campaigns of 1776 with their summer uniforms and they were to spend one of the coldest winters on record in those same uniforms. They had no boots. It was said that the soldiers marched in the cold winter of 1776 and you could see the blood in the snow where they marched because their feet were wrapped in rags. Most of their enlistments were up. The citizen soldiers, many from New England, had left their farms and their shops and had only signed on for a year. They had every right to head home and many did so. The Continental Army that began with perhaps 20,000+ under Washington's personal command but a year before had dwindled to perhaps 3,000 troops at Valley Forge. The situation was desperate. The winter, cruel and unusually cold. The winter was doing what the British had not done –breaking the spirit and resolve of the patriots of the new Republic. Were they to be in Benjamin Franklin's phrase, "sunshine patriots" only or were they to be winter patriots as well, their mettle forged in the ice and snow of Valley Forge? It is the lowest moment of the darkest hour of the Republic. It is the valley of decision at Valley Forge. Washington knows that if the Continental Army disbands the sacred cause is lost; but as long as the army remains together there is still hope. The congress is beginning to call for a new general to lead the army. It is bad and the situation is going from bad to worse and from worse to dire. What if Washington chose that very moment, beset by politics and doubts and cold and a lack of

supplies, what if Washington chose that very moment to return to Mount Vernon? What if he said, “the cause is lost”, and sued for peace? We would not be here today, a free land, ordained by God’s hand.

We have all seen the picture of how Washington chose to act instead. He is kneeling in prayer in the snows of Valley Forge. He is in the woods. His horse is behind him. His hat is doffed. He is a man consumed in prayer. In the valley of the shadow, he prays, fervent, effectual prayer. Heartfelt, soul-searching, desperate, pleading and yet with a certain humble confidence in the God whom he has served; the Father of the nation prays: “Surely, Lord, you have not brought us thus far, just to have this sacred cause die in the cold of winter. Surely, Lord, there is a new Spring of freedom, not just for us but for the world that is about to dawn. Surely, Lord, the freedom and dignity we have in Your Son, Jesus Christ, is the freedom you desire for all people. Let not this noble experiment die. Let freedom ring...”

There are several witnesses, according to Lilbach’s book, of this event that has been poo-pooed by others as mere myth. One is a Tory sympathizer, a Pennsylvanian who sided with the British and a Quaker, who upon hearing Washington’s prayer declares: “Our cause is lost. God cannot but intervene with a prayer such as this!” As our scripture from the book of James says: “*The prayer of a righteous man has great power in its effects.*” (James 5: 16) The prayer of George Washington has great power in its effects, as well. For from that low ebb, the tide now turns, the army now forged in strength in the crucible of Valley Forge is stronger, better, more disciplined. From the lowest point comes the greatest prayer and from the greatest prayer issues forth the greatest nation the earth has ever seen.

**I think it is not just hyperbole nor rhetoric to suggest that from this one great prayer was forged our great land.** That is the power of just one righteous man, praying just one heartfelt, righteous prayer, prayed to the One righteous Lord God Almighty!!!!!! It is the *PRAYER THAT FORGED THE NATION...*

We live in a strange time. Our prosperity has dulled our heart. The church of the Lord Jesus Christ is in marked decline. While we possess many things and great freedoms, nevertheless the land is filled with spiritual malaise. We have everything. We should feel happy and blessed but we are angry and unhappy as a people. The people do not seem to see the need to pray to the God from whom the blessings of liberty flow. The churches are empty and emptying. The secularists make argument upon argument why God did not intervene at the very beginning of our country. Spiritually, we are dead and dying as a nation. Without a rebirth of faith in the land there can never be a rebirth of freedom either. We have forgotten Valley Forge and the sacrifices that made us. We have forgotten the godly people who were our founders. We have forgotten our history as all mention of God is being edited out of that history. And may I say, unfortunately, on this 4<sup>th</sup> of July Sunday, I believe we have forgotten the God who is the author of liberty. We retire to our comfortable air conditioned houses today as sunshine patriots whose faith is no longer forged in adversity. We have forgotten George Washington’s prayer; we have forgotten the prayer that forged the nation...It may be hot today in temperature but the Spirit is cold, it is as if the ice and snow of Valley Forge has fallen spiritually upon the nation as a shroud...it is the Valley of Decision once again...But it takes just one person, one righteous person, one person praying one righteous prayer to the One true and living Righteous God. It takes heartfelt, fervent prayer. It takes knowing that without God everything we love and cherish will be forfeit. It takes humbly getting down on our knees and praying...as George Washington prayed at Valley Forge...that’s what it takes...I end with the quote from 2 Chronicles which is where we need to be today as a nation: There it says: “*If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.*” (2 Chronicles 7: 14) May that be the prayer that forges a nation today. Amen.

By: *The Reverend Dr. Stuart D. Broberg, The Church of the Covenant, Washington, PA*