

## THE WASHINGTON OF WASHINGTON COUNTY

July 10, 2011 –Jeremiah 2: 1-11

### The Church of the Covenant

Was George Washington, the Father of our Nation, a Christian or not? Is there evidence that at the hardest moments of his life he turned to God in earnest and heartfelt prayer? Are we here today as a nation because of THE WASHINGTON OF WASHINGTON COUNTY and his faith? In the 1960's there was a history book written by a man named Boller that supposedly debunked the fact that Washington was a Christian. The historian Boller called Washington a "Deist". Deism basically believes in God, but believes that God created the universe and then stepped back to let us, purely by human instrumentality, to take over from there. God is at a distance. Deism believes there is no notion of an active and present God; a God who hears our prayer and answers our prayer. There is no resurrection so they would say; Jesus is not alive today and active in the world. It is only about us and our efforts; for God is afar off and distant. So was George Washington just a Deist? Or was he a fervent, praying, committed Christian?

I have recently read a very interesting book on Washington titled, SACRED FIRE, on the life and faith of the Washington of Washington County. It is by Dr. Peter Lillback, a Presbyterian minister. It debunks the debunking of 50 years ago and makes a very strong case that indeed Washington was not just a Christian but that it was his Christianity that laid the foundation for our nation. Lillback notes in his book that there is ample evidence for the following –Washington regularly attends to divine services in his tent every morning and evening...and seems very fervent in his prayers. –the military knew that he gave a part of each day to private prayer and devotion. Indeed, "New orders are read from his Excellency... every morning after prayer." (Sacred Fire, Lillback, p.399) Evidently, Washington first received his orders from the God of the universe and only then did he issue them to his troops. These are not the actions of a Deist. Because Deists don't pray because God is too far away and believe won't intervene anyway. But a Christian prays because a Christian knows that God not only hears and not only answers prayer but intervenes in the lives of men and history and nations.

George Washington is often referred to as "the indispensable man". He was there when on the very first day the Continental Congress knelt together in prayer, as they thought Boston was ravaged by the British and that almost from the beginning their sacred cause was lost. Psalm 35 was read together and aloud, "Thou hast seen, O Lord, be not silent! O Lord, be not far from me! Bestir Thyself, and awaken for my right, for my cause, my God and my Lord!" (Psalm 35: 22-23) And then the entire Continental Congress knelt together in prayer. Grown men wept. They prayed: "Look down in mercy...upon these American States who have fled to Thee from the rod of the oppressor, and thrown themselves upon Thy gracious protection, desiring to be henceforth dependent only upon Thee..." (Ibid., p. 379) It was a congressional prayer meeting. May I say that America began that day; there and then was the beginning of the nation; when the leaders got down in humility on their knees and prayed together acknowledging their utter dependence upon God. America began with a prayer. America began with its leaders on their knees.

This Washington of Washington County was indeed God's indispensable man. He led the army and kept it together by the very force of his character and the depth of his faith. He led personally the Constitutional Convention that wrote our Constitution and personally by his example, faith and character held the squabbling states together. He was unanimously elected the first President of the United States and when many wanted to crown him as King he refused the crown and took the far humbler title "Mr. President". And when he had served his country in two terms he willingly

relinquished the powers of his office, setting the example for all time for those Presidents who would follow him. At his first inauguration in New York, when they had just speedily written the oath of office which he was to repeat to become the Father of the nation, they had left off mention of God. And so Washington added, with great fervor and sincerity at the end of the oath –“SO HELP ME GOD!” This was a man who knew from whence all blessings, power and honor come in life. Not from his own action and strength and skill; but only from the hand of the Lord God Almighty. No Deist would shout at his inauguration “So help me God”. No Deist would claim God’s help and provision at his inauguration. This is the Washington of Washington County.

There were many times in his life when he prayed to the Almighty. But the darkest days of the new Republic were certainly those days at Valley Forge. He has been recently beaten twice by the British and badly; the British have taken Philadelphia, the nation’s capital. Washington settles in at Valley Forge for the long, cold winter of 1777-1778. Most of the soldiers enlistments are up or expiring; many simply left and went home. They have no winter clothing, no boots. It is said you could trace where the soldiers walked by the blood that was left in the snow. They had few provisions. They lived in rude stick huts that they constructed themselves. They were held together by the force of one man’s character, strength and faith and that man was George Washington. The fate of the new nation hung in the balance. At the darkest moment of the darkest day there is a disputed story of George Washington kneeling the snow and offering up a fervent prayer. Some historians say this is just a myth. But Lillback notes that from at least five separate sources it can be confirmed. A Tory sympathizer, an American who supported the British cause, supposedly overhears the prayer and declares “(The British) cause is lost.” God could not help but honor such a prayer from such a man. In the U.S. Capitol in the Prayer Room in our nation’s capital is a stained glass window depicting George Washington on his knees in prayer at Valley Forge. In the dark crucible moments of life, when our faith is forged in the darkest of valleys, it is then we fall to our knees, and pray our most fervent prayers, and cry out to God. May I say, America was saved yet again by a prayer, forged at Valley Forge in the heart of the Washington of Washington County. O may our congress get on their knees again!

He called America “the sacred cause”. At least 52 times in his writings George Washington referred to it as “the sacred cause”. After he had retired as President he happened to meet an old Warrior Indian Chief who had opposed him during the French and Indian War. The chief told him that he had instructed 12 of his warrior’s muskets to be trained on George Washington in the heat of the battle. But not a bullet hit; although there were many holes in his uniform. At the Battle of Monmouth many years later, George Washington personally rallied the troops by riding his horse in front of the lines as the British trained their muskets at him. But not a bullet got through. Can it be said that this indispensable man had God’s protection over him? That God’s hand of providence guided him and guarded him? Can it be asserted that the Lord God had a plan and it was to use Washington to bring into being the United States of America? To use him, and his faith, and his prayer, at the hardest, darkest moments of the founding of the Republic? Would we even be here today, worshipping freely in a free land, would we be here, but for the faith and the prayer of this one man???? This is the man for whom our city and county are named. This is the Washington of Washington County.

The prophet Jeremiah from our Old Testament lesson recounts a time in Israel’s history. They were the chosen people and God had often and miraculously intervened on their behalf. God had blessed them with abundance and a land flowing with milk and honey. But in their success the people of God had forgotten the God who had led them through the darkest and most “crucible moments” of their history. They did not worship Him; they had better things to do on the Sabbath. Their temple as empty as their religion. Their prayer as empty as their heart.

So the prophet asks a rhetorical question. Jeremiah asks: *"Has a nation changed its gods?" (Jeremiah 2: 1-11)*

It is the same question I ask today –"Has *this* nation changed its gods?????" With George Washington did we begin well, but have we taken what he gave us as a gift and ended badly???

May we get on our knees today. May we offer up fervent prayer to God. May the sacred fire be kindled in our hearts today. May we pledge our sacred honor and all that we have and are and could ever be to this sacred cause for which men and women have prayed and sacrificed and given their lives...Has this nation changed its God?

May our answer, so long as we have life and breath, be *NEVER* --SO HELP US GOD!!!!

Thank you, Lord, for the Washington of Washington County.

Amen.

*By: The Reverend Dr. Stuart D. Broberg, The Church of the Covenant, Washington, PA  
IF THIS HAS BLESSED YOU, PLEASE PASS IT ALONG TO A FRIEND!*