

**TRINITY EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH  
MINOCQUA, WI  
SERMON FOR JULY 4-5, 2021**

***22 By the mercies of the Lord we are not consumed, for his compassions do not fail. 23 They are new every morning. Great is your faithfulness.*** (Lamentations 3:22,23)

Independence Day is the peak of patriotism, the national celebration that outdoes all other celebrations. Fireworks, festivals, flags, food, fun, family and a three-day weekend. All to celebrate our freedom, our independence as a country, birthday #245.

Understand this: it is possible to live in the U.S. and still not be free. Wait, what? Look around: bitter partisanship and anger and bitterness – is that freedom? The constant struggle to have more money and more stuff; honestly, the more stuff you own, the more your stuff owns you – is that freedom? The fear of violence and loss and sickness and death – is that freedom? Pride over sin parading through the streets – is that freedom?

Thomas Jefferson's marvelous declaration was not the first declaration of independence. Here's the very first one ever: "I can be like God." Recognize it? Satan in the Garden of Eden coaching Eve and Adam: Don't listen to God. You can do your own thing, go your own way. No one can tell you what to do, not even God. You are free. Repeat after me, Eve/Adam. My will be done.

That sounded pretty good to them – rather than Thy will/God's be done, my will be done. It's all about me – what I want, when, where, how I want. Everything revolves around my will be done. And when Adam and Eve followed "my will" instead of "thy will," they chose the opposite of freedom. They chose slavery, slavery to sin and Satan and death.

Same here. Ever heard or said this: "It's a free country, so I can do whatever I want. And the more I get to do whatever I want, the freer I am. And if anyone gets in my way, you're limiting my freedom. Not in America, not in my house. I have my rights and I have my desires and I am free to pursue them. So says the sinful nature in us all.

We are free, if you want to call it that, to drink as much as we want. We are free, if you want to call it that, to lust and commit adultery as much as we want. We are free, if you want to call it that, to take on as much debt as we want, to let greed get the best of us because, well, it feels good and I am "free." We are free, if you want to call it that, to hate and despise and boast as much as we want.

That's not freedom. That's not independence. That's slavery. Jesus says, ***"Everyone who sins is a slave to sin."*** (John 8:34)

Getting my way isn't freedom, not in God's eyes. True freedom doesn't come from a country or a political party or an individual leader. It comes from the truth. Again in John 8, Jesus says, ***"If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."*** (vv. 31-32)

Verse 22 of Lamentations 3 says this quite precisely, ***"By the mercies of the Lord we are not consumed, for his compassions do not fail."*** We do not need nor do we want spiritual independence. That's a one way ticket to hellfire and an eternity apart from God. We depend on God's mercy. Without it, we are lost. And Jeremiah, the author of this woefully title book of Lamentations, assures us that the Lord's mercies never fail. His grace never runs out. Romans 5:20 declares, ***"Where sin increased, grace increased all the more, so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord."***

You want mercy, compassion, all of it undeserved? God the Father offered up his Son to pay the debt of our sin. And the Son willingly went along with the Father's plan: ***"You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,***

**that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich”** (2 Corinthians 8:9). Through his death and resurrection, forgiveness of sins and eternal life are offered to us, to all.

Forget prideful declarations of independence and false freedom. This is our necessary declaration of dependence. It is only **“by the mercies of the Lord we are not consumed, for his compassions do not fail.”** On the day of your baptism, on the day God brought you to faith, he marked you as his own and ever since, you and I have received one blessing after another. Spiritual blessings of repentance and faith. A place of worship where the Word of God is proclaimed faithfully and the Lord’s Supper is received personally for the assurance of forgiveness. Every day, we rejoice in our dependence upon our Savior. Every day is “Happy In Dependence Day!”

Along with these spiritual blessings, God’s faithful, unchanging promises belong to us as well. Promises that we’ve got a home in heaven waiting for us. Promises that he will guide us day-by-day in this life until we get there. Promises that he will provide everything we need when we need it. **“(The Lord’s) compassions do not fail. They are new every morning. Great is your faithfulness.”** (vv. 22b,23)

The writer of Lamentations is the prophet Jeremiah. This book as a whole is extremely sad and depressing. Jeremiah was an eyewitness to the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. He saw some terrible things: people killed, property destroyed, the Temple demolished, even mothers cannibalizing their own children. And yet, he has hope enough in the Lord to write the words of our text and to write a bit later in the chapter: **“Men are not cast off by the LORD forever. Though he brings grief, he will show compassion, so great is his unfailing love”** (3:31,32).

The first time I visited the Rocky Mountains in Colorado, I never saw the mountains. I drove on them and through them, but was never able to actually see the tops of the mountains or enjoy a panoramic view from a distance because it was cloudy and rainy the whole time. But I knew they were there and that inspired me to want to go back and see them. God’s love and compassion are like that. Even when they seem to be shut out by our tears and frustrations, even when they seem to be drowned out by the cares and concerns of this world, his love and compassion and faithfulness continue to support and surround us. Always. Without fail. Every morning we rejoice in our dependence on our Lord. Every day is “Happy In Dependence Day!”

On this 4<sup>th</sup> of July weekend, we’re also reminded of God’s grace upon our nation. Let’s shift our focus from personal to national for a few moments. The Lord has granted the United States of America tremendous blessings. The freedoms and opportunities we have are without parallel in human history. We have freedom to choose from seemingly limitless opportunities for everything from occupation to recreation, from religion to politics. America owes its greatness to God’s guidance and blessing alone. Our nation needs God’s mercy and promises.

Not everyone thinks this, of course. There’s a whole lot of anti-God, anti-Christian culture and scheming and mockery out there. Marriage is treated lightly. Gender and sexuality are personal choices, we’re told now, much like shopping online at Amazon – just put your choices in your cart and move on. Life is considered disposable at both its beginning and its end.

How do Christians react to all this? How do you react? Well, there are many who feel like we need to protect Jesus. Political candidates and the cancel culture are all going to destroy the Bible. Wait, what?

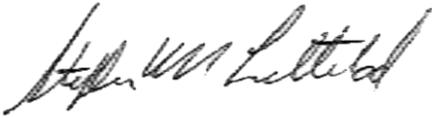
So the church has lasted longer than Nero and anyone else who’s tried to destroy it. The New Testament church has lasted for 2000 years, Jesus says it will – by his grace and power – even stand up against the gates of hell – but now in 2021 some politician or the cancel culture or social media trolls are going to destroy the Bible?

Is our God that puny, is our God that weak that we’ve got to protect Jesus and his Word from the cancel culture and anti-Christian views? You know what Jesus says to that? “Uh, you do know that I rose from the dead, right? Every star you see – I created them all and placed them all and keep them right where they are. I

walked on water. I healed the sick. I raised the dead. I died on the cross. I rose from the dead. I am the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.”

Friends, what does our country need more than anything else? Not a certain political party. Not a change in the laws. What do we need? The truth. We need more of God’s Word, more of God’s people sharing the mercy and promises of our gracious, Almighty Lord. That’s what changes hearts. That’s what changes minds. That’s what sets people free.

May we continue to live as faithful citizens of two kingdoms: the kingdom of heaven and our earthly home, the United States of America. And may this brief but important Scripture serve as a powerful reminder of the blessing of being in dependence on our Savior: ***“By the mercies of the Lord we are not consumed, for his compassions do not fail. They are new every morning. Great is your faithfulness.”***

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Stephen W. Luchterhand". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name.

Pastor Stephen Luchterhand  
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