

A Personal Word for You

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Our goal: Bring forth a new nation

IN early June of this year, I stood at the feet of the seated Lincoln in the memorial graced by his name in Washington, D.C. I read words every American school child should know: “Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation...” And I sat down on the stones bordering the reflecting pool in front of the memorial, and I thought of the deep import of those opening words of Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address.

I am glad I have this chance to share my thoughts with you now. Because I thought of the remarkable quest that our forefathers launched: to actually bring forth a new nation steeped in a new idea—the idea of democracy. I thought of their shining lives. You and I read of them today just as we would read of a pantheon of classical demigods... Washington, Jefferson, Franklin, Madison, Jay, Hamilton, Adams, Revere! How their very names resonant with our very souls!!

Remember with me the closing words of their Declaration of Independence: “...And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor.” (Not the affirmation of connected personal interdependence which gave their pledge to each other the power to bring their idea to reality!) Their signatures made them criminals subject to capital punishment and they knew it! What shining lives!

And finally, I thought of their sacrificial struggle to birth the “new nation.” How can we ever be glib about this sacrifice? Their quest cost them. It hurt. It weighed. And at times it was simply shattering. It brought endless days of darkness with no foreseeable light. The struggle was just as real as the sacrifices were stringently demanding.

Think of the British! They were the world power. They held the reins of true power in their fists which they would readily enforce with steel and truncheon. And think of the Loyalists! Here were fellow Americans who would immensely benefit with the success of the cause of Independence, but who would not lift a finger to help their peer native born. How do minimize the struggle?

I thought of Revolution. What makes a revolution? What brings about a change that can be as fresh as gardenias in springtime? I think you have to have a compelling idea that has the potential to help everyone injected by its adrenaline. And I think that idea has to capture people who are willing to devote their best thinking and living to see it walked out in the streets of their cities. Yes, and then a revolution must call forth everything these devoted lives can give to bring that idea into the realm of what is realizable.

Think of the American Revolution! Think deeply of that struggle! In 1776, seized by an idea, the Colonists raised an army to make that idea called “democracy” a reality. They struggled with two huge enemies. The one outside, the British. And the one within, the Loyalists. The Revolutionaries could not pay their soldiers. Nevertheless, they fought on. They boiled their shoes to eat. They marched barefoot in the snow. They died. Fast forward five long years! In 1781, they fought the British and the Loyalists.

They still could not pay their soldiers. They fought on. They were still boiling their shoes to eat. They still marched barefoot in the snow. And they defeated Cornwallis at Yorktown!

My friends, today, I sit here in my home in Shreveport. I believe with my whole heart that you join with me in seeing that we are on the edge of a new revolution. We are captive to the idea that if we connect each other together with caring love that we can stop the disintegration of our cities and grow a new model of community. It does take areal sacrifice because we battle the forces of evil as well as those who have a vested interest in the status quo. But I know with your help we can succeed.