

**Sun., July 4 - Independence Day, Holy Communion**

Series: Strange Fire Series: (Pentecost) "The Fire Within"

Memory Verse: "Don't fear, because I am with you; don't be afraid, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, I will surely help you; I will hold you with my righteous strong hand." -Isaiah 41:10

Message: (Pentecost) The Fire Within: The Rockets' Red Glare -Pastor David

Reading of Scripture: Acts 7:51-60

Sermon Scripture: Isaiah 41:10-13

Blurb: Happy Independence Day! Are you singing the national anthem for our country this Sunday? Did you know it is actually a hymn about God? This Sunday we'll see this song help us understand the biblical truths of seeing God in times of trouble and defeat. When we do, we will have a steady joy that carries us even through the worst of times. Our hope is secure in Jesus!

**[Recorded Worship Beginning]**

**WELCOME** -Pastor Andrew

**MEMORY VERSE:** -Pastor Andrew

"Don't fear, because I am with you; don't be afraid, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, I will surely help you; I will hold you with my righteous strong hand." -Isaiah 41:10

**WORSHIP MUSIC SET** -Sanctify

*No Longer Slaves*

*Hope Has a Name*

Worship prayer -Pastor Andrew

**[Live Worship Beginning]**

**GATHERING SONG:** *I Am Free* -Sanctify

**WELCOME** -Pastor David

Independence Day

Holy Communion

**MEMORY VERSE:** -Pastor David

"Don't fear, because I am with you; don't be afraid, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, I will surely help you; I will hold you with my righteous strong hand." -Isaiah 41:10

**WORSHIP MUSIC SET -Sanctify***Chain Breaker**No Longer Slaves**The Star-Spangled Banner* (vs. 1,4)

Introduction: We sing this hymn not as the national anthem for the United States, or in any way to promote that God favors our country over others, or as a glorification of war and violence. But, we sing this hymn as a prayer for our country and as a song to God. We remember this moment in our country's history and we proclaim as Jesus' disciples that God is our Preserver, and that we put our trust in Him.

Worship prayer -Pastor Andrew

**[Both Recorded & Live Worship]**

**SCRIPTURE READING:** Acts 7:51-60 -Reader: Noah Werner

Stephen was the first Christian who was killed for his faith. During his trial in Jerusalem, he accuses the Jewish leaders of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. And as he dies, the Holy Spirit comes to his aid. Acts 7:51-60,

Stephen said, "51 'You stubborn people! In your thoughts and hearing, you are like those who have had no part in God's covenant! You continuously set yourself against the Holy Spirit, just like your ancestors did. 52 Was there a single prophet your ancestors didn't harass? They even killed those who predicted the coming of The Righteous One, and you've betrayed and murdered Him! 53 You received the Law given by angels, but you haven't kept it.'

"54 Once the council members heard these words, they were enraged and began to grind their teeth at Stephen. 55 But Stephen, enabled by the Holy Spirit, stared into heaven and saw God's majesty and Jesus standing at God's right side. 56 He exclaimed, 'Look! I can see heaven on display and the Human One standing at God's right side!' 57 At this, they shrieked and covered their ears. Together, they charged at him, 58 threw him out of the city, and began to stone him. The witnesses placed their coats in the care of a young man named Saul. 59 As they battered him with stones, Stephen prayed, 'Lord Jesus, accept my life!' 60 Falling to his knees, he shouted, 'Lord, don't hold this sin against them!' Then he died."

**GENERATIONAL BRIDGE:** Red Rock Camp Re-Cap Video -Pastor Andrew

**MESSAGE: (Pentecost) The Fire Within #7: The Rockets' Red Glare**

**PP#1:** The Fire Within: The Rockets' Red Glare

"But Stephen, enabled by the Holy Spirit, stared into heaven and saw God's majesty and Jesus standing at God's right side." Acts 7:55

"The Fire Within: The Rockets' Red Glare." Acts 7:55 "But Stephen, enabled by the Holy Spirit, stared into heaven and saw God's majesty and Jesus standing at God's right side."

So, did you know that our country's National Anthem is actually a Christian hymn? You can't really tell from the first verse, which is the one we all memorize and sing at public venues. But there are other verses, and in them you can really see how it is a poem and song about God!

**PP#2:** *Painting of Francis Scott Key, second image from:*

<https://www.battlefields.org/learn/articles/star-spangled-banner#:~:text=President%20Woodrow%20Wilson%20adopted%20the,anthem%20to%20the%20United%20States>.

So, do you know the story behind our National Anthem? Who wrote it, can anyone tell me? [Francis Scott Key] Yes! And yes, it tells a story about war!

It starts with the American Revolution, as we like to call it, or "The Rebellion" as the British called it. The American leaders signed the Declaration of Independence on what day? [July 4, 1776] The war continued...at times very precariously for the States, until 1783, when the British government essentially forfeited claim on the new country in order to focus on the growing threat of France. By the way, side note we historians love: the British leader of the war in North America at the end was the Fourth Earl of Sandwich, who supposedly invented the sandwich—you know, meat between two slices of bread! So, although we kicked out the British, we kept his lunch idea!

Well, at first we had an uneasy peace with Great Britain, but as the French started causing problems in Europe—with Napoleon and all—Great Britain began plying the fledgling U.S. against the French. By the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the British were seizing American ships on the open seas and conscripting our sailors for their war—upwards of 15,000 men! Finally, when negotiations broke down, the U.S. Congress declared war on Great Britain in 1812...hence The War of 1812.

The powerful British navy greatly outplayed the small American navy, and in August of 1814 they made it all the way up the Potomac River and burned Washington D.C. Next stop was Baltimore, 40 miles up river, protected only by Fort McHenry. If Baltimore would be captured, the British would likely win the war, and the new country would go back again to Great Britain.

A Georgetown lawyer, Francis Scott Key, had sailed on a merchant ship to the British fleet in the harbor to negotiate the release of a prisoner. Because Key gained first-hand knowledge of British activities while there, he was not allowed to return to shore until after the coming battle.

**PP#3:** *Image of Bombardment of Fort McHenry, third picture from:*

<https://www.battlefields.org/learn/articles/star-spangled-banner#:~:text=President%20Woodrow%20Wilson%20adopted%20the,anthem%20to%20the%20United%20States>.

Starting September 12, the British launched a naval attack on Fort McHenry. For 24 hours, they shelled the fort. Now, the fort's cannons forced the ships to keep their distance, so, along with the hanging cloud of smoke, their accuracy was poor. Throughout the night Key worried about the fall of Fort McHenry. If it were captured, the whole war was likely over. Early the next morning, with his heart pounding in his chest, Key climbed up to the deck and strained to see through the billowing smoke what had happened to the fort. He knew that every morning at revelry, they raised their 30X42-foot U.S. flag over the fort. Was it there, or was the Union Jack now flying there? And this is the moment Key described in the first verse of what became our National Anthem.

"O say can you see, by the dawn's early light,

What so proudly we hail'd at the twilight's last gleaming, [The flag had been there the night before.]

Whose broad stripes and bright stars through the perilous fight

O'er the ramparts we watch'd were so gallantly streaming?  
 And the rocket's red glare, the bombs bursting in air,  
 Gave proof through the night that our flag was still there,  
 O say does that star-spangled banner yet wave  
 O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave?"

Key, who was also an amateur poet, scratched these lines while on the deck of his ship when he saw the flag. The British, exhausted from the night and running low on ammunition—their landing party had also been repulsed—finally resigned that they could not capture the fort, and withdrew.

**PP#4:** *Image of the original flag from Fort McHenry preserved in the Smithsonian, first picture at:*  
<https://www.battlefields.org/learn/articles/star-spangled-banner#:~:text=President%20Woodrow%20Wilson%20adopted%20the,anthem%20to%20the%20United%20States>.

Later that week, Key wrote three more verses to his poem and published it under the title of “Defence of Fort M’Henry.” Key’s brother-in-law set the poem to a risqué song tune and it grew in popularity with sailors and patriots. In 1889 the Navy used the song to accompany flag raisings, and in 1916 President Woodrow Wilson declared the hymn the nation’s anthem. The House of Representatives passed it in 1929, now called “The Star-Spangled Banner,” and it was officially adopted in 1931.

**PP#5:** *Image of Rebekah and Nathan folding the flag at Fort McHenry*

The flag itself is preserved in the Smithsonian, and Fort McHenry is restored and held as a museum and memorial. A special personal memory for my family came a couple of years ago when we visited Fort McHenry and my kids were selected to help raise the fort’s flag that morning!

**PP#6:** *Image of sheet music of “Star-Spangled Banner, fourth picture at:*  
<https://www.battlefields.org/learn/articles/star-spangled-banner#:~:text=President%20Woodrow%20Wilson%20adopted%20the,anthem%20to%20the%20United%20States>.

But I want you to hear the fourth verse of this hymn. Listen for how it includes God!  
 “O thus be it ever when freemen shall stand  
 Between their lov’d home and the war’s desolation!  
 Blest with vict’ry and peace may the heav’n rescued land  
 Praise the power that hath made and preserv’d us a nation!  
 Then conquer we must, when our cause it is just,  
 And this be our motto - ‘In God is our trust,’  
 And the star-spangled banner in triumph shall wave  
 O’er the land of the free and the home of the brave.”

So, a patriotic song: yes. A song about war and bloodshed and conquest, yes. And it juxtapositions that for some liberty is preserved, while others are slaves. Yes again. Set to a gentleman’s club tune? Still yes. But don’t miss that in the last verse, it proclaims that the country over which the flag flies was preserved not just by brave soldiers, but also somehow by *God’s hand*. Now the British were also God’s children, for sure, but when Key took a long, hard look at the situation and events, he could only conclude that the United States was rescued and preserved by God’s help. It was not a coincidence. As a man of faith, he saw God’s hand. And, in the poem, it says

that the people of our country praise God as our saving power. Not that our country is better than any other, but we do proclaim that God has helped us and defended us. And, the line “In God is our trust” shows up again during the Civil War when it became our nation’s motto as “In God We Trust.”

**PP#7: Rockets’ Red Glare**

1. Trust in God during difficult times

Now, please hear me: my point in this long story is not to glory in war or violence. God always laments war. Nor do I want to promote American exceptionalism or that God chooses our country above others. I believe God has a special plan for each country, and that God blesses and helps each country, in accordance with His plan. But I do want you to hear that our country’s national anthem is a song of faith that professes that we as a country need to put our trust in God, especially during bleak and difficult times.

And there’s my sermon’s point this morning! That’s a biblical point for us as Christians: that we need to put our hope and trust in God, especially during bleak and difficult times.

Many of us know the passage from Isaiah 40 about how God lifts us up when we are weary to soar on wings like eagles. But the next chapter is also awesome!

**PP#8: Isaiah 41:10-13**

10 Don’t fear, because I am with you; don’t be afraid, for I am your God.

I will strengthen you, I will surely help you; I will hold you with my righteous strong hand.

11 All who rage against you will be shamed and disgraced.

Those who contend with you will be as nothing and will perish.

12 You will look for your opponents, and won’t find them.

Those who fight you will be of no account and will pass away.

13 I am the Lord your God, who grasps your strong hand,  
who says to you, Don’t fear; I will help you.

Let’s look at Isaiah 41, verses 10-13. “10 Don’t fear, because I am with you; don’t be afraid, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, I will surely help you; I will hold you with my righteous strong hand. 11 All who rage against you will be shamed and disgraced. Those who contend with you will be as nothing and will perish. 12 You will look for your opponents, and won’t find them. Those who fight you will be of no account and will pass away. 13 I am the Lord your God, who grasps your strong hand, who says to you, Don’t fear; I will help you.”

We have a God who is bigger than whatever we are facing. And when we give our problems to God, sometimes God defeats them for us! Sometimes, however, He holds us as our problems cause us deep pain. But either way, our God is with us. We will make it through: maybe not the way we want, but we can have peace as the battle rages, like seeing the flag illuminated by the explosions. I was talking with Lynnette Welsch not long ago. Her husband fought cancer for eight years. Then her son suddenly died, followed by her husband. Lynnette said to me, “My faith is carrying me. I just don’t know what I would do without God. I don’t know how people can make it without God.” Church, in the middle of the battles, put your hope in God. He is there to help you and to hold you.

**PP#9: Rockets’ Red Glare**

1. Trust in God during difficult times

2. Your problems help you see God

The bombs and missiles hurling back and forth between the ships and Fort McHenry were terrifying. And yet, notice that Key, in his poem, acknowledges that it was the light from these explosions that also made him able to see the flag flying there. “And the rocket’s red glare, the bombs bursting in air, Gave proof through the night that our flag was still there.” The exploding rockets provided the proof of his hope. This is a second biblical truth that we need to really hang on to. God allows us to experience many problems, many difficulties, because when we experience them, we can see God better. God, after all, is more interested in our character than He is in our comfort! And our character, our firm reliance on God, comes not when we are comfortable and things are sunny and easy, but as He helps us persevere through battles and hardships. We learn to rely on God, trust in God, depend on God, because only then can make it. When our strength is spent, when we are weak, then we experience just how strong God’s power is.

**PP#10:** John 14:16-18

Jesus said, “16 I will ask the Father, and He will send another Companion, who will be with you forever. 17 This Companion is the Spirit of Truth, whom the world can’t receive because it neither sees Him nor recognizes Him. But you know Him, because He lives within you and will be with you. I won’t leave you as orphans. I will come to you.”

Matthew 28:20b

“Be sure of this, I myself will be with you always, until the end of this present age.”

This is one way that the fire of the Holy Spirit burning within us is kindled. The fires we face on the outside cause our inner fire of the Holy Spirit to grow. And our strength inside grows by a power that comes from outside of us. Jesus promised this inner strength when He told His followers, John 14:16-18, “I will ask the Father, and He will send another Companion, who will be with you forever. 17 This Companion is the Spirit of Truth, whom the world can’t receive because it neither sees Him nor recognizes Him. But you know Him, because He lives within you and will be with you. I won’t leave you as orphans. I will come to you.”

And this was fulfilled at Pentecost. The Holy Spirit did come upon Jesus’ followers, and filled them. Ever since, every Christian receives the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, the Fire Within. So, we are not alone. God is with us. God is IN us! Right before Jesus ascended back to heaven, He promised, “Be sure of this, I myself will be with you always, until the end of this present age.”

Sometimes we wonder where God is in our lives. Sometimes we wonder if He’s there for us. But when the battle rages around us, when we strain into heat of the battle, there we will see witness that indeed we are not alone, that God is there for us, that God is seeing us through it, and that we have hope and victory because of our God, and so our inner fire burns brighter.

**PP#11:** Rockets’ Red Glare

1. Trust in God during difficult times
2. Your problems help you see God
3. Seeing our Hope in defeat gives us joy

One more biblical promise. Even if the battle at Fort McHenry would have been lost, and maybe even the war, Francis Scott Key, because he was a man with faith, would still have had joy in God. You see, those who trust in God do not get their joy when things go right or go well for them. Yes, he was happy, and he sang songs of praise when things went favorably. But God would

have carried him, and all the Americans, even in defeat. We would still be able to sing of God's steadfast love. This is what keeps us from letting our patriotism override our religion. Our confidence doesn't come only when God blesses us the way we want. Our confidence comes from the *God* we trust in, not from the good things God gives us. This is why the British still could trust in God, even in failure. After all, God blessed them, too. And years later God restored the relationship of our countries, and brought us together as strong allies!

In the Bible, Jesus followers suffered a lot. But they still proclaimed joy. When you heard the story of Stephen earlier, it was at his death that he had a special experience of God's joy. He was arrested, put on trial and stoned. God did not spare him or rescue him from all that. But look at the joy he saw, literally!, illuminated by the bombs exploding on him! As they were accusing him, the Holy Spirit showed him a vision into heaven, and he saw a bit of the glory of Jesus sitting on God's right side. And as they stoned him, he offered his life to Jesus, and was so filled with God's grace, that he forgave them as he died.

Ultimately, our joy comes from having God, who is faithful to always remain with us, to sustain us, and who will keep His promise to take us home in final victory.

**PP#12:** *Image of a bruised, wounded person resting secure in Jesus' arms, with joy on his/her face.*

Today we pray for our country. And for Great Britain. And for the other nations of our world. We pray for an end to war and violence. But as we do, we also proclaim that we who are filled with God's Holy Spirit dwelling within us have our inner fire kindled when we face problems and troubles. We learn to trust in God during the difficult times, for it is during them that we find that He preserves us and carries us. In fact, it is often during our hardships that we can see God clearly. And even when we face defeat, our hope in God still gives us joy.

The rockets' red glare in our lives, the bombs bursting in air all around us, give proof through the dark nights of the soul, that our God is still there. And that hope gives us sustaining joy.

Amen.

## **HOLY COMMUNION**

Using bread and juice - Bread in individual cups spread apart, and juice in cups, too, in long tables across the front of the church.

Prayer of Confession

Words of Assurance

Introduction

The Great Thanksgiving

The Words of Institution

Prayer for the Holy Spirit

Receiving the Elements

**[IN-PERSON WORSHIP ONLY] SONG:** *Do Not Fear* -Sanctify

**[IN-PERSON WORSHIP ONLY] CLOSING SONG:** *Hope Has a Name*

**OFFERING:** -Pastor David

-Give of your monies to God's work through this church. You can give in person, mail it in or, most conveniently, you can make an automated transfer or a debit card payment on the church website or by using the "square" on the bulletin.

**ANNOUNCEMENTS -Pastor David**

Next Sunday's message: Cassi Betker will preach! Her message will be "Backdraft," claiming the dangerous power of the Holy Spirit.

**MEMORY VERSE -Pastor David**

"Don't fear, because I am with you; don't be afraid, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, I will surely help you; I will hold you with my righteous strong hand." -Isaiah 41:10

**BENEDICTION -Pastor David**