

PATRIOTISM

By Peter H. Wolf

For Alice Hall & Doug Molenaar Presidents Day Party

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I happen to be a direct descendant of Benjamin Franklin (the legitimate line!), so I hope my remarks are even more appropriate than they might otherwise be.

To begin, I'd like first to put patriotism in perspective.

Highest in my personal priorities in life are:

(1) Family. And I think maybe everyone here has that first also.

(2) I'm a Christian. If I said I'm "religious" or "moral" many more people might have that in second place also.

(3) I'm patriotic -- to the United States it so happens, but that's also where I was born, grew up, and have lived all my life. We have to agree that people of other countries are also patriotic, but to different countries. Of course!

If I've succeeded in putting patriotism in perspective, now let's talk about perspective within patriotism itself, because there can be priorities there also.

What is patriotism? One dictionary definition is "devoted love, support, and defense of one's country; national loyalty." So now I'm going to restrict what I'm talking about to our country, the United States of America.

Patriotism here is often rendered as respect for, pride in, or devotion to:

Our flag

Our National Anthem

Our forefathers

Our servicemen and women

Our Presidents (especially next Monday, Presidents Day, as this delightful party celebrates).

But there are other elements of patriotism I would add, and they are less tangible:

Pride that we are a democracy and not a theocracy or
Autocracy, at least not yet

Pride in our Constitution or our Declaration of
Independence

Pride that we have free elections -- most of the time, but
not always.

Pride that we have constitutional rights

Pride that we have -- something dear to my own heart -- an
Independent judiciary that often enforces those
constitutional rights and resolves conflicts among
them.

How about some things that may be more controversial, or about
which people could differ?

Pride that we are a nation of immigrants?

Pride in our Civil War (which side)?

Pride we have lessened Jim Crow?

Pride we have been called the leader of the free world?

Pride we allowed women to vote 100 years ago this coming
August? (But it took 144 years!)

Pride that we tried, but repealed, prohibition?

Pride in some Presidents, but not others?

Patriotism is fine, but it's not simple. Our nation is not
perfect. We have, as Franklin said, "a Republic, if we can keep
it." It takes work, it takes tolerance, it takes compromise.

Some of these qualities may be in short supply right now. We
have penalized people for exercising their constitutional right
of free speech to protest some of our shortcomings.

We have some severe conflicts between freedom of religion and
other constitutional rights.

We must, it seems to me, be careful not be narrow, or even
idolaters -- in the name of patriotism -- about things like
flags, national anthems, even people.

So patriotism, yes, but keep it in perspective. And the best perspective is to work -- work tirelessly, compassionately, tolerantly -- to improve what we're patriotic about. Thank you.

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