

Two Flags
July 4th Celebration - 2010
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The Fourth of July, for most Americans, involves watching fireworks, enjoying cookouts, and wearing red, white, and blue. However, during most of the first century of our nation's independence, July 4th was set aside for a day of public worship. How wonder it is this year that July 4th falls on a Sunday giving us the opportunity to gather together to praise God for this great country in which we live.

Our sanctuary is adorned with two flags. The fact that they normally sit off to the side means most of the time we don't even notice them. We've moved them front and center this morning to draw attention to them.

The first flag – the American Flag – we know all about. We know the legend of how it was sewn by Betsy Ross per George Washington's order. We know its symbolism: fifty stars for fifty states, thirteen stripes for the thirteen colonies.

We have recited its Pledge of Allegiance from the first day of school. We know its protocol: raise it briskly, lower it slowly. Never let it touch the ground.

We know a lot about the American flag, but we might not know the story of the other flag – the Christian flag. The Christian flag is one of the oldest unchanged flags in the world.

The year, 1897. Brighton Chapel, Coney Island, New York. The Sunday School Superintendent decides that one of his children's talks will be to remind the kids of the symbolism of the American flag and how it represents the United States of America. As the Superintendent thinks about what he will say in his message, something crosses his mind. Wouldn't it be marvelous to have a Christian flag to symbolize the Christian faith? He starts thinking about what such a flag would look like.

He reckons it could have the same colors as the American flag – red, white, and blue. The main color of the flag would surely have to be white to symbolize both the purity of Jesus and our life lived in his forgiving grace. Instead of stars being central, a cross would take their place – a red cross to remind us of Jesus' shed blood upon the cross. The cross could be surrounded by blue – the color of royalty – reminding us that Christ is the King of all kings, Lord of our lives.

And just as the American flag has its Pledge of Alliance, the Superintendent wrote a pledge for the Christian flag as well:

"I pledge allegiance to the Christian flag
and to our Savior whose cross it bears,
one spiritual fellowship under that cross,
uniting us in service and love."

There's protocol for displaying the Christian flag, too. Wherever it is displayed anywhere around the world, it is to be to the *right* of the national flag, in the place of honor.

On this Fourth of July weekend, we remember how we live under two flags: the Christian flag and the American flag – God and country. We owe obedience and loyalty to both; both are worthy of respect. Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, Jesus says, and give to God what is God's.

Is it possible to be patriotic and Christian at the same time? St. Paul seems to think so. In the 13th chapter of Romans he talks about our Christian responsibilities as citizens of a nation. We are to honor and show respect to our governing authorities, and do such things as pay taxes for the benefit of all citizens. It is our Christian responsibility, St. Paul argues.

In the 2nd chapter of 1 Timothy we read that we are to respect and honor those who serve us and pray for those in power. Even as out-of-touch and corrupt as our governmental officials can sometimes be, the Bible assures us that God can still work through them to bring about his will.

I believe the best thing we Christians can do for this country is to know what God's will is and then work to bring it about in our neighborhoods and in our workplaces. We must get to know our governmental officials and vote those into office who will uphold Christian values. We must work for the good of all people, for as President Roosevelt once said, "This country will not be a good place for any of us to live in until we make it a good place for all of us to live in." This is what it means when we pledge "one nation, under God, with liberty and justice *for all*."

Yes, Christians live under a dual citizenship. We are citizens of our country *and* citizens of the kingdom of God. When we see each of these flags, we should not only see the flag, but what it represents. The American flag represents our great nation. It proudly stands for all of the women and men who have fought and died and labored for the freedoms we experience this day.

And when we see the Christian flag we should be reminded of what it represents – a life that is free because of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Two flags, two kingdoms – both instruments that God uses to offer us freedom and salvation; both under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

Amen.