

# Patriotic Service 2026

## *America. Christian or not?*

Fairview Missionary Church | Angola, IN

Scripture: Assorted

Speaker: Joel Greenwood

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As I was praying this last week over what I was going to talk about this year for our annual patriotic service, I recognized for maybe the first time that I enjoy asking difficult questions and then trying to answer them. I've recognized that I can be a glutton for punishment, and I just assume that everyone else enjoys trying to answer these difficult questions too, and so I take you on that journey with me.

I do believe it is good for us to learn together, and I believe it's important for us to address these difficult questions, not just maybe on our own, but even publicly as a church and try to answer them, because many of the people that you and I are going to encounter in this world have also asked these questions and come up with their own answers.

And many times I find that the answers that they have come up with maybe are not based on fact or based on reason, but are mostly based on feeling. And yet, how we answer these questions will directly impact how we live and the decisions that you and I make. So if we want to build relationships with others, in order to be able to share our faith, you and I must be willing to dialogue on some of these difficult topics.

Some of these questions that our world is wrestling with right now are very politically motivated and because of that have the potential to burn relational bridges. If I were to ask the rhetorical question today, raise your hand if some of those relational bridges have been burned because of politics amongst your friends or family or whatever, many of you could probably raise your hands.

I've heard of many difficult conversations and relationships that have been broken because of some of these difficult political conversations. And so, I believe it benefits us greatly to take the time to study and to know what we are talking about.

One such question that I have heard lately around which there is much debate, and that I want to ask today, since we are close to July 4th, and we're celebrating 250 years as a nation, is this: "Was America founded as a Christian nation?" Now you know why I apologized at the beginning of the message, right? Difficult questions. Now, I want to do something that's going to be fun for me, but maybe not fun for you, all right?

So, everybody stand up, if you will, all right? Go ahead and stand up, and I am going to ask you that question. Was America founded as a Christian nation? And when I ask you, if you think the answer is yes, I want you to face north. And if you think the answer is no, I want you to face south, all right? Don't do it yet, okay? I don't want you to be influenced by your neighbor or by the rest of the congregation. I was going to have you close your eyes, but I trust you that you're going to vote with confidence here, okay?

All right. So, on the count of three, face the direction of the answer. That's yes, that's no. One, two, three, go. All right, now that you're awkwardly facing each other, okay? This is good. Thank you guys for participating. You can sit down, all right? That is all for today. I hope that you enjoyed the July 4th service. I'm just joking. We will answer this question, all right? Now, before a fight breaks out, let me just tell you, you're all right and you're all wrong, okay?

You're all right and you're all wrong, because the answer depends very much on how you define certain terms in the question. What does it mean to be founded? What do we mean by the term Christian? Are we talking about evangelical Christian? What are we defining there? And what does it mean to be a nation? All of these things dilute how we answer that question, and so there's no easy answer. Now, I know that even in addressing this question, some of you are saying, "Pastor, just give me the answer to back my position so I can win an argument," all right?

But that's not what I'm going to do today. You guys know me better than that. Instead, I want to give you some information so that you can form your own conclusions, but more importantly, so you can dialogue in a knowledgeable and in a loving way with others that may be asking this question as well. Now, before we even address this question, was America founded as a Christian nation, we need to ask ourselves, why is this question so important?

Why is this question important, and what is the motivation behind it? Why are we even asking this question? So, let's pray, and then we're going to have some fun, all right? Heavenly Father, we do come together today, and as always, I thank You for the freedom that we have in this nation to be able to even publicly dialogue about this, for us to be able to gather together and to worship You and to praise You.

I thank You for the many individuals that have sacrificed so greatly so that we have the freedom to gather and worship like we are today, while at the same time, I fully understand that as a nation, we do not always follow You. We do not always make decisions that are honoring and pleasing to You. We certainly are a nation that is full of sin. And so, Father, it is our prayer that we would love others well.

For those of us that do believe in You and have given our lives to You, that we would love others well and help point them in Your direction. We ask this in Jesus' name, amen. So the first question I wanted to answer before we can get to the real question was America founded as a Christian nation is, where did this question originate? Where did it come from? When did we start asking this question?

And if you do some research, you find that this question really started to become more popular. It's not that it wasn't asked before, but it became more popular on a national level in the 1970s and the 1980s. So you have to go back roughly 50 years, and that's when this question became popular, and the reason that it became popular was certainly politically motivated.

The reason why we began asking this question and trying to answer this question was politically motivated because if the conservative right could prove that the United States of America was founded as a Christian nation, their hope was that our policies and our laws would move in their favor of what they wanted to see, and it also would help move the elections and the power in the direction of the conservative right.

Now, naturally, the liberal left didn't want this to be true, because if we were founded as a Christian nation, it would limit their power and their influence. And so they then went on the defensive and began trying to prove that we were not founded as a Christian nation. But here is an interesting thought. Why does the answer to this question matter to you? And why did it matter to them? Why even ask this question?

Why try to use this question with a political motivation? Well, here is the truth. It mattered to them, and it matters to most of us because there seems to be this unwritten rule or feeling as Americans that this country should continue to move forward in the direction that the Founding Fathers desired. There is this unwritten feeling inside most of us that if the Founding Fathers founded our nation in a certain way, you and I should continue in that direction.

But if you take a moment to step back, this is interesting that you and I have this kind of internal feeling because most people of most other nations don't care what their Founding Fathers wanted. They don't care what the direction was, they don't care what the purpose for their nation was, and they feel zero duty or responsibility to fulfill the wishes of those that started their country.

In fact, many of them want the exact opposite of what the Founding Fathers wanted because they very much disagree with them. The only reason that this question matters would be if you and I actually care what our founders wanted, recognizing that what they wanted was based on opinions that were formed over 250 years ago in a world that we will never understand or live in.

You guys get that, right? You and I are trying to answer a question. We are trying to get into the minds of men and women that we never knew and trying to decide their motives. And I just want to tell you at the very beginning that this is a fool's errand at best. Trying to understand what was in the minds of people 250 years ago, living in a world in which you and I have never lived and will never know.

Professor Greg Fraser describes it this way, "In some, both the Christian right and secular left are largely wrong about the religious beliefs of America's key founders, and so their prescriptions for America based on those assumptions are also wrong. America's founders were not all Christians." We should know that, right? Like, not everybody in America was Christians.

And they did not intend to create a Christian nation. On the other hand, they were not rank secularists, secularists, who intended to erect a wall of separation between church and state. Instead, they were religious men who wanted religion, but not necessarily Christianity or evangelical Christianity, how you and I think of this term. They did not, they wanted this to have a significant influence in the public square.

So, what Greg is saying, or his conclusion, based on the study of history, is that basically both sides have tried in their debate to insert their own thoughts into the minds of our founding fathers that they probably never had in order to prove their point. So, how do we defend against this? I believe the best thing that you and I can do when we are in conversations with others about faith and about politics, and certainly about our founding as a nation, is to state the facts.

Simply state the facts, and then we can come to our conclusion, we can have a conversation, and to do so in a loving way. So, what are some of the facts that we can point to? I'm going to read some quotes to you. Some of them are more lengthy, some are short, some I will have the full quote on the screen, others I will not. This first one is the longest, and I'm just going to read to you again some of the documents of our founding as a nation.

And so, this first one that I want to read is George Washington, our first president. It's his Thanksgiving Day proclamation. How many of you have heard of this before? Raise your hand if you've heard of this. Not many, that's what I suspected, that's okay. So I'm going to read this whole thing to you. Again, it's the longest one, and of course it was written 200 years ago, all right? So some of the wording is going to be a little different, but I think you're going to pick up on what he was saying. All right. George Washington's Thanksgiving Proclamation.

You can go look this up later if you want to. Whereas it is the duty of all nations to acknowledge the providence of Almighty God, capital A, capital G, to obey His will, to be grateful for His benefits, and humbly to implore His protection in favor, and whereas both Houses of Congress have by their Joint Committee requested me to recommend to the people of the United States a day of public thanksgiving and prayer to be observed by acknowledging with grateful hearts the many signal favors of Almighty God, again, capital A, capital G, especially by affording them, us as people, an opportunity to peaceably establish a form of government for their safety and happiness.

Now, therefore, because of that, I do recommend and assign Thursday the 26th day of November to be devoted by the people of these states to the service of that great and glorious being, capital B, who is the beneficent author, capital A, of all the good that was, that is, or that will be. That we may then all unite in rendering unto Him our sincere and humble thanks for His kind care and protection of the people of this country previous to their becoming a nation.

For the signal in manifold mercies and the favorable interpositions of His providence, I told you there were some interesting words which we experienced in the course and conclusion of the late war for the great degree of

tranquility, union, and plenty which we have since enjoyed for the peaceable and rational manner in which we have been enabled to establish constitutions of government for our safety and happiness, and

particularly the national one now lately instituted for the civil and religious liberty with which we are blessed and the means we have of acquiring and diffusing useful knowledge, and in general, for all the great and various favors which He has been pleased to confer upon us, and also that we may then unite in most humbly offering our prayers and supplications to the great Lord capital

L and ruler capital R of nations and beseech Him to pardon our national and other transgressions, to enable us all, whether in public or private stations to perform our several and relative duties properly and punctually, to render our national government a blessing to all the people by constantly being a government of wise, just, and constitutional laws, decreely and faithfully executed and obeyed to protect and guide all sovereigns and nations, especially such as have shown kindness to us, that's funny in parentheses, and to bless them with good government, peace, and concord, to promote the knowledge and practice of true religion and virtue, and to increase the science among them and us, and generally to grant unto all mankind such a degree of temporal prosperity as he alone knows to be best.

Could you imagine a president reading that today? Yeah, isn't that crazy? Now I want you to notice some things because I'm just sharing with you the facts. So this was his declaration, obviously, of Thanksgiving Day, which now we don't always celebrate on the 26th. It's always the fourth Thursday of November or however that works out. But saying as a nation, we should have a day of thanksgiving. Notice as I was reading that, there were many mentions of Almighty God, capital A, capital G, ruler, capital R, Lord, capital L.

But I also want you to notice in that there is no mention of Jesus. So pay attention to that. We're just reading it. Okay, I'm not coming to any conclusions. I'm just sharing with you things that would be important for us to point out. Now, the second document that I want to read to you, and I'm not going to read the whole thing, you are much more familiar with this, the Declaration of Independence.

Probably the most famous line in the entire document is this, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator, capital C, with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." The very first thing we should notice in reading this document that it was very normal in their culture and in their time when they wrote this, the idea of a Creator, capital C, and that you and I were created in His image, and therefore, based on that foundational truth, because all mankind was created in His image, that we all have rights that are inherently given to us because of our Creator, all right?

Again, just more facts, more information, as I shared to you, what was going on in the minds of our Founding Fathers. Let me read to you another one. This one is probably a lot less known. This is Article 16 of the Virginia Declaration of Rights. Now, many of you understand the history of our nation, that before we became a nation, we had colonies or states that existed. And every one of these colonies or states had their own kind of legislation or things that they would live by, these declaration of rights.

Article 16 of the Virginia Declaration of Rights states these things, a freedom of conscience, that religion, it was the understanding, that religion must be guided by reason and conviction, not by force or violence. They go on to expound upon that and say there should be no compulsory support, meaning that this declaration forbids the government from forcing individuals to attend or financially support any religious worship place or ministry.

So you understand what they're saying, right? We have the freedom of religion, and it should not be forced upon anybody. There should be no national religion that is forced upon somebody that they must attend or financially support. They believed in the separation of belief and civil rights. This document specifies that an individual's religious opinions or beliefs must not diminish, enlarge, or affect their civil capacities, all right?

You were not supposed to vote for somebody based simply on their religious beliefs or lack thereof, and that person's beliefs was not to impact them doing the best of what was for the country, their civil capacities. And then one that I think is great. This document, the Virginia Declaration of Rights, speaks of a mutual respect. It emphasizes the duty for all citizens to practice Christian forbearance or patience, love, and charity toward one another.

This is one of their founding values that as a colony, as a state, that the citizens in thereof should value these moral things that come from Christianity. So here is what they agreed. They agreed in the free practice or exercise of religion that that was a right, not a privilege granted by the state.

By the end of the revolutionary era, every state constitution offered significant protection to religious liberty. It was one of the founding values of our founding fathers. It cannot be argued, this idea of religious liberty. What cannot be argued is that many of our founders felt that Christianity was essential to creating a good or a virtuous public.

They thought it was good for the nation. If our people were Christians, it would be good for our nation, and creating a public who were willing to lay down their own selfishness for the greater good of the Republic. Our Founding Fathers believed that it was beneficial to have virtuous and moral members of a society. Now, that seems like common sense, right? Do you want to lead a nation of hooligans and people that are getting in trouble all the time?

No, a nation is going to be a lot better if people are selfless and exhibit these characteristics or morals of the Christian faith. But you have to remember, as these founding fathers were creating our nation, Christianity was the only game in town to pull these morals from.

There weren't a lot of other options to choose from, and so the question really becomes that cannot be answered, because we cannot put our minds in their mind, is this: Did they want to have a virtuous people simply for the sake of a moral society, or did they truly believe these morals in that faith themselves? You guys get the question, right? We don't know that answer.

We can read what they wrote, we can read about their statements that they made, but we don't know if they personally did believe this, or they were just pushing this for a nation, recognizing our best chance as a nation is if we have people that are selfless and are willing to lay down their lives for the greater good of the Republic. One of the best resources I found on this entire topic in my hours of study and research on this was a historian by the name of John Fia, and he actually wrote a book with this very title, "Was America Founded as a Christian Nation?" And let me give you his summary to that book.

And I will have this whole quote up here. Answering the question of whether or not America was founded as a Christian nation is not so simple. What students of history can affirm is that religion has always enjoyed a special place in American society, not just since the founding, but since the planting of the colonies.

We can also see clearly the importance of religious freedom in the American founding, a commitment that springs from the historically American attitude toward the uniqueness and significance of religion. Christianity has had an enormous impact on the development of the American identity, but secular ideas have been particularly formative as well.

America then is indebted to a mixed heritage which makes on contemporary students of American origins a demand of sober, responsible, and humble historical thinking. He's saying it's a difficult question to answer. That's basically what he's saying, because both are true. Yes, Christianity played a huge role in our founding, but so did other secular beliefs, and to push one side or the other at the expense of the opposite would be untrue.

Here is one thing that we can say. Our founding fathers believed there was nothing wrong with civic leaders endorsing religious practices, but that they had to come to the agreement there should be no compulsion. You

guys get that difference, right? Totally okay for civic leaders to endorse and encourage people to pray or whatever else, but definitely should not be forced upon the people.

Our founding fathers understood that religious liberty must be fiercely protected because it would try to be taken and that religious convictions of all Americans be carefully guarded, not just Christianity. So what does this mean? How should we as Christians view America? How should we celebrate our country? How should we approach politics in this world in which we live today where it's such a hot-button topic that burns relational bridges?

Let me quote the late John MacArthur. This is my last quote for the day, and I'm not going to put the whole thing up there, but I am going to put what I think is the best conclusion that I have seen. The late John MacArthur says this, "We American Christians recognize that historically we have lived in a Christianized culture that is very different from what the early church ever experienced.

In fact, it is very different from what many Christians today in other parts of the world experience. For example, there are Christians in Israel living out their faith in a thoroughly unchristian culture. There are Christians in Arab countries who have absolutely no influence whatsoever in the political sphere. There are Christians in places where the culture's morality is entirely dominated by Islam or Hinduism.

There are Christians in places in the world today where their faith puts them at risk of murder. Now, I am not saying that God doesn't expect us to be salt and light to our culture. He definitely does. I am simply saying that we have no mandate from God to take culture back. I'm going to read that one again, just that one sentence.

I am simply saying that we have no mandate from God, scriptural or otherwise, to take culture back. Because, frankly, it doesn't matter whether you go to hell as a policeman or a prostitute. It doesn't matter whether you go to hell as a Republican or a Democrat. It doesn't matter whether you go to hell as a capitalist or a socialist. Ultimately, it doesn't matter because you would be condemned either way.

And here is the quote I want you to read. "The color of our spiritual citizenship is not red, white, and blue, and believing otherwise only causes uncertainty about our real identity and goal as Christians." Let me read that last sentence again. The color of our spiritual citizenship is not red, white, and blue, and believing otherwise only causes uncertainty about our real identity and goals as Christ followers.

Trying to answer the question of whether America was founded as a Christian nation can be a fun debate. It can be a fun study. It can be a fun conversation with certain people. It can be a very difficult conversation with others. But the answer to that question doesn't change our responsibility and duty as Christ followers. Now, I want to get to Scripture, and I have a little bit of time left. I want to end with this.

Intentionally, Scripture is very clear that you and I, regardless of our nationality, are strangers and aliens in this world. We do not have a mandate in Scripture to establish a Christian nation, but we do have a mandate to love others, even those we disagree with. Let me read to you from the Sermon on the Mount, the very words of Jesus, "You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye and tooth for tooth, but I tell you, do not resist an evil person.

If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you. You see, the attitude of Jesus is quite different in relating and interacting with people that agree or disagree with you or think very differently on certain topics.

He goes on. He says, "You have heard that it was said, let's love your neighbor and hate your enemy, but I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven, for he has caused His Son to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the

unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward are you going to get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that?

And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even the pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect. And then Jesus' final words to His disciples and to us right before He was taken up into heaven, Matthew chapter 28. Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations." Doesn't just say America there, it doesn't just say one particular nation, of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you, and surely I am with you always to the very end of the age. Let me tell you the truth of the matter as you have this conversation with individuals.

I know some of you are going to be getting together with friends and family and neighbors this holiday weekend. Let me just remind you of this. As politics may come up, as patriotism may come up, this is the truth. You cannot force people into a relationship with God by establishing laws. You cannot force people into a relationship. It works much better if you encourage them into a relationship with God by loving them.

That is how we are going to accomplish the task that Jesus has left for us, making disciples of all nations, loving others, not making some Christian nation, the goal that all of our laws are all perfectly aligned. That's not how you get somebody to love Jesus. You don't make a law and make them have to obey it and force them. Our founding fathers knew that. You can't force somebody into a relationship with God. You can encourage them by love and by good deeds.

So let me wrap this up. What am I telling you to do? What am I asking you to do? I am asking you and encouraging you to fight the right battles. Encourage others to live moral lives, appeal to the wisdom of Scripture, but know that you cannot force it upon them and don't even try. Understand in your conversations with others that it is certainly true.

We've read just a few texts today that Christian values and beliefs definitely impacted the founding of our country, but to claim that we were founded as a Christian nation, as most would understand that term today, is not totally accurate either. So I encourage you to keep the main thing, the main thing, and allow your life to be an example that points people towards Jesus, because that's what we are called to do.

Point people towards Jesus. Have the conversations. Stay calm. Do so in a loving way. Did you know and again, did you know that it's possible to disagree with somebody and not get angry? Did you know that? It's okay to disagree with somebody and to come to a different conclusion and just say, "Yeah, we're just going to agree to disagree. I don't even have to let my blood pressure rise." You know that? I can just say it's okay.

Now I can be passionate because I love somebody and I care about them, and certainly when I'm talking about faith and talking about morals and values, I can be more passionate, but at the same time, I can't force it upon them because that doesn't work. I need to love them, care for them, even those that disagree with me, so that God can receive the glory. Let me pray. And so, Heavenly Father, we come before You. I pray that You would continue to work on our hearts and in our minds.

Help us to be able to have knowledgeable conversations with others. There are certainly many lies and deceit. As the enemy tries to turn people away from you, he will use whatever means necessary. If it's politics, he's great with that. But Lord, my prayer is that as your followers, our main goal would continue to be helping people take their next step towards you, making disciples, baptizing people in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

And so, help us to live lives that are honoring to you and that point people towards you. We ask this in the powerful name of Jesus. Amen.

