

North Summit Church
Keep Building
Genesis 1:26–28

Independence Day Weekend — America's 250th Anniversary

INTRODUCTION

“It ought to be commemorated as the day of deliverance, by solemn acts of devotion to God Almighty.” — John Adams, July 3, 1776

- On July 3rd, 1776, a heavyset forty-year-old lawyer sat by candlelight in a rented Philadelphia room and wrote home to his wife in Massachusetts. His name was John Adams. Congress had voted the day before to declare the colonies free and independent states, and Adams could barely contain himself.
- He told Abigail the day would be remembered as *“the most memorable epoch in the history of America.”* Future generations, he predicted, would mark it with *“pomp and parade, games, sports, guns, bells, bonfires, and illuminations, from one end of this continent to the other.”*
 - Adams got the date wrong — he meant July 2nd, the day of the vote, not July 4th, the day of the Declaration's wording.
 - 250 years later we've corrected his math and kept his instinct. We still light the fireworks. We still throw the parades.
 - **And if we're honest, we still owe the devotion he assumed we'd remember to offer to God Almighty**
- Adams was doing more than predicting a party. He was describing a people who would keep building on something solid enough to last two and a half centuries — the conviction that human beings are made by God, for a purpose, and that the purpose doesn't end when the fireworks do.
- That conviction goes back further than 1776. It goes back to the first chapter of the first book of the Bible.

Genesis 1:26-28 ESV

26 Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." 27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. 28 And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

- Dominion is a word that makes some people nervous — history is full of people who used it to justify conquest, the strong running over the weak.

- But look at the very next chapter: God puts the man in the garden “*to work it and keep it.*” Two Hebrew words: *avad* and *shamar*. Serve it and guard it. Those same two words describe the priests who would later serve in the tabernacle.
 - **Our first calling, before sin ever entered the world, was priestly work:** cultivate what God has made, guard it, bring order out of raw material, help it flourish.
 - **That’s dominion. Not conquest. Cultivation.**
- Theologians call this the cultural mandate, and it has never been revoked. God repeats nearly the same words to Noah after the flood. Every generation since has inherited the same job description: build, cultivate, create, and make things flourish, in a way that reflects the character of the God whose image we carry.
- **Here’s the connection to 1776.**
 - The men who wrote our founding documents weren’t writing in a vacuum. Most were raised in a colonial culture soaked in Protestant conviction: sermons as the main form of public rhetoric, colleges founded to train pastors and pursue truth in the light of Scripture, colonial charters that opened with language about the glory of God before they ever reached the mechanics of government.
 - Harvard’s founding purpose, recorded in 1643, was partly to keep New England’s churches from being left with an untrained ministry once the first generation of pastors had died. Its original motto was *Veritas Christo et Ecclesiae*: truth, for Christ and the church. Long before *Veritas* meant what it means on a sweatshirt today, the men who coined it would have recognized exactly what Jesus says in John 8: real truth isn’t a slogan on a seal.
 - It does something. **It sets you free.**
 - Princeton was led for over twenty years by a Presbyterian minister named John Witherspoon, the only clergyman to sign the Declaration of Independence. A young student named James Madison stayed an extra year at Princeton just to study under him. This wasn’t a subversive culture under the surface of society. This was simply the air our founders breathed.
- So when Thomas Jefferson wrote that we are endowed by our Creator with rights no government granted and none can rightly take, he wasn’t inventing something new. He was drawing from a well the church had been digging for seventeen centuries: **human beings carry the image of God, and that image comes bundled with both dignity and a job to do.**
 - Even the Liberty Bell carries the same conviction, cast right into the bronze: “*proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof,*” this was lifted straight out of Leviticus 25. The Assembly that commissioned that bell in 1751 chose those words on purpose, to mark the fiftieth anniversary of Pennsylvania’s charter — speaking of the Year of Jubilee, when debts were forgiven and captives went free.
 - **What was the foundation of all of this:**

Not a bigger nation only, or even a freer one — a nation, a church, a family, a life, that is more true, more good, and more beautiful, because it reflects the One who made it.

- Two hundred fifty years in, that's the question Adams was really asking in that letter. Are we still building on that foundation?
- Theologians and philosophers have long called truth, goodness, and beauty *the transcendentals* — qualities so basic to reality that you can't fully have one without the other two, because all three come from the same source.

Three things for us to reflect on this morning. Truth. Goodness. Beauty. And a call to keep building.

#1. BUILT ON TRUTH

John 8:31-32 ESV

31 So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, 32 and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

Jesus doesn't say freedom leads to truth. He says truth leads to freedom.

- On a weekend when we say the word freedom every few minutes, that order is worth sitting with. A society that stops caring whether things are actually true — that starts treating truth as whoever has the most followers or the loudest microphone — isn't getting freer. **It's just choosing who to be enslaved to.**
- The founders bet everything on the opposite claim. Read the Declaration again: Jefferson didn't write "*we hold these preferences.*" He wrote **truths**, self-evident ones, built into the structure of reality itself — the same way Psalm 19 says the heavens declare the glory of God without uttering a word. Creation isn't neutral static. It's a text, and it says something true whether or not anyone is listening.
- Only that kind of truth is sturdy enough to hold a claim like "*all men are created equal.*" If truth is just a construct, so is equality, and so is every right resting on it. That's exactly why the Declaration grounds freedom in *the laws of nature and of nature's God* rather than simply asserting it. Remove the God, and eventually the laws go too — and the freedom was resting on them the whole time.
- We're living through what happens when a culture forgets this. When institutions stop asking "*is this true*" and start asking only "*does this work for us*" or "*how does this make us feel*," everything gets shaky: courtrooms, classrooms, newsrooms, dinner tables.
- **What does building on truth look like where you are?**

- Teaching your kids that some things are actually true and some things are actually false — and that loving them means telling them the difference even when it costs you and them something.
- Running your business, filing your taxes, and living with honesty and integrity the same way whether or not anyone's watching.
- Reading before you repost, praying before you reply or react, and holding your opinions loosely enough that evidence can still move you.
- The oldest colleges in this country weren't founded to make people employable. Their charters say plainly they existed to pursue truth, because truth belongs to God and is worth chasing for its own sake.
- The Bible says there is a Word behind everything that is, and that Word became flesh and told us plainly, "*I am the truth.*" Jesus doesn't just point toward truth. He is the very embodiment of truth.
- If the next 250 years are going to be freer, and not just louder, they'll have to be built on that kind of truth again.

#2. BUILT ON GOODNESS

Micah 6:8 ESV

He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

- Genesis 1:31 — after each day of creation God calls what He's made good, but on the sixth day, after handing the man and woman the job of dominion, it was **very good**. That word carries a moral weight and an aesthetic one at the same time: a world where things function as they should, and where things are right, both at the same time.

You cannot build a self-governing nation out of people with no capacity to govern themselves.

- The founders understood something we sometimes forget: freedom and virtue were never separate projects.
 - John Adams told the Massachusetts militia in 1798: "*Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other.*"
 - Washington said nearly the same thing in his farewell address, calling religion and morality "*indispensable supports*" of political prosperity.
 - Neither man was naive about human nature — the whole system they built (separated powers, courts, elections) assumes people, even good people, can't be fully trusted with unchecked power. It only holds if enough people inside the system still care about being good, not just about winning.
- **Building goodness starts small and close to home.**

- A family where honesty, integrity and justice are at the forefront and Christ is at the center.
- Showing up for the widow, the orphan, and the stranger — the three groups the Old Testament names again and again as the test of a nation's righteousness, because they're the three groups with no leverage to demand it.
- A business that tells the truth about its product even when a lie would sell more of it.
- It also looks like being honest about where we've fallen short. "*All men are created equal*" was true the day it was written, and it was not yet fully lived out the day it was written. Building goodness means telling that story honestly rather than smoothing it over — each generation since has had the job of closing that gap a little further. Simply the same cultural mandate at work: keep building, keep cultivating, keep making it more good than you found it.
- Paul lists goodness alongside love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control in Galatians 5, and calls the whole list the fruit of the Spirit. Fruit doesn't happen by accident, and it doesn't happen overnight. It grows, season after season, out of a root that's been tended. That's the kind of nation worth spending the next 250 years growing.

#3. BUILT ON BEAUTY

Exodus 31:1-6 ESV

1 The LORD said to Moses, 2 "See, I have called by name Bezalel ... and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with ability and intelligence, with knowledge and all craftsmanship, 4 to devise artistic designs, ... And behold, I have appointed with him Oholiab ... And I have given to all able men ability, that they may make all that I have commanded you:

- The first time Scripture says someone is filled with the Spirit of God for a specific task, it isn't a prophet or a king. It's an artist, gifted to make something beautiful for worship.
- That should reorder how we think about beauty. Psalm 96 says strength and beauty are in His sanctuary. Psalm 27 says the one thing David asked for above everything else was to gaze on the beauty of the Lord. Ecclesiastes says He has made everything beautiful in its time. Beauty runs as deep into the character of God as truth and goodness do — it was never meant to be an afterthought bolted on once the serious business was handled.

A culture that stops caring about beauty isn't becoming more serious. It's dying a slow ugly death.

- Look at what the early colonists actually built. Walk through any old New England town, and the tallest building, visible from every direction, is the church steeple

— a statement about what a community believed mattered most, built right into the skyline, long before anyone called it zoning. These weren't wealthy people with unlimited resources, but they gave their best material and their best craftsmanship to buildings meant for worship, because they believed beauty pointed past itself, toward the God who is worthy of honor.

- Even our founding documents carry this instinct. Read the preamble to the Constitution out loud sometime: *"We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union."* That sentence didn't have to be beautiful to be legally binding. It's beautiful anyway, because the people who wrote it were shaped by a tradition, going back through the Psalms and the prophets, that believed the truest things deserved to be said well.
- **What does building beauty look like for us?**
 - Craftsmanship in your own work, whatever that work is — doing it not just correctly but well, the way God could have made a merely functional world and instead filled it with sunsets and majestic mountains, and breathtaking plants and animals.
 - Supporting the arts in your own community instead of treating them as optional.
 - Worshiping with your whole self on a Sunday morning instead of just going through the motions.
 - Building homes and churches and public spaces that are dignified, not merely efficient, because the people who will walk through them carry the image of God.

Philippians 4:8 ESV

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

- Truth. Goodness. Beauty. All in one breath — and Paul's verb is active. Think about these things, on purpose, the way you'd tend a garden, not just admire them from a distance. That's the cultural mandate recapitulated, in New Testament language and context.

CONCLUSION: A CALL TO KEEP BUILDING

- Two hundred fifty years ago, a group of imperfect men, standing on a foundation older than time itself, dared to build a nation on the conviction that human beings are made by God for truth, for goodness, and for beauty, and that freedom only makes sense in service of all three.
- That conviction didn't start in 1776. It started in a garden, with a job description that has never been withdrawn: be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, subdue it, have dominion. Cultivate. Guard. Help it flourish.

- That job is still ours. So the charge for the next 250 years is the same charge — handed back to you in the same words God gave it in the garden.
- **Be fruitful and multiply.**
 - A charge to the family first, and flows out from there. Invest in the next generation — the children in your own home, or the student you're discipling over coffee.
 - Deuteronomy 6 says to teach these things to your children constantly: when you sit, when you walk, when you lie down, when you rise.
 - **Truth, goodness, and beauty are never more than one generation from being lost.** Don't hand that job to a school or a screen. Take it home.
- **Fill the earth.**
 - A charge to show up in the actual public life of this country instead of watching it from the sidelines. Jeremiah told the exiles in Babylon to seek the welfare of the city and pray for it, because in its welfare they would find their own.
 - So...Vote. Serve on local boards and in local politics. Show up to the council meetings. And always pray for the people who lead you, whether or not you voted for them (1 Timothy 2).
- **Subdue it, and have dominion.**
 - A charge to your vocation, whatever it is. Paul tells the Colossians that whatever you do, you're to do it with your whole heart, as for the Lord. A nurse, a farmer, a legislator, a mechanic, a teacher — every one of them does priestly work when they leave the world more true, more good, or more beautiful than they found it.
- And underneath those three, one more thing, without which none of the rest will hold: laws can restrain evil, but they can't make anyone good.
- **Only the gospel changes a human heart.** That's still the church's first job, and its primary one.

1 Corinthians 15:58 ESV

Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

- Every faithful thing you build, every honest thing you say, every beautiful thing you make, matters — even the parts of it this world never fully notices.

Revelation 21:5, 24-26 ESV

5 And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." ... 24 By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it, 25 and its gates will never be shut by day--and there will be no night there. 26 They will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations.

- The tense John uses for what God is doing to that city, and to everything else, is present tense: He is making, right now, all things new. We build because the God who started this in a garden is the same God who will finish it in a city, and He has invited us to build alongside Him — this year, and for as many of the next 250 as He gives us.
- Two hundred fifty years ago, a nation was born on that conviction. Whether the next 250 belong to it has less to do with who wins the next election than with whether we keep building: on truth, on goodness, on beauty, in our homes, our churches, and our public square, until the building is finished by the only hands able to finish it.

[Closing Prayer]