

July 5, 2026

Paul Purdue preaching

A week ago, Connie and I woke up every morning and walked to the Ocean to watch the sunrise. If you sit still and listen, the waves resound like a meditation tape, and the pinks, blues, and yellows dance over the wet sand and waves like Monet's, Renoir's and Cassatt's. Silently focussed on the horizon, we marveled that we saw fish jumping and dolphins porpoising in the foreground as we looked elsewhere.. Human vision is miraculous. We are "wonderfully made".(Psalm 139)

Every morning after sunrise, we meandered down the beach, waded in tidal pools, examined shells and watched sandpipers catching their breakfast. One day, a young man walked our way carrying a full size American flag. Why? We did not ask, but we speculated. We wondered aloud "what does it mean to be patriotic?" and "what do we have to celebrate on this July 4?" Sometimes when I read the headlines, I want to rend my garments and put on sackcloth and ashes, but sometimes we need to look around and remember what we cherish.

Watching the sunrise over the Atlantic, we easily celebrated our Land's geography. From Acaida to Zion our nation is blessed with amazing natural beauty. There are good people too. One morning at 6:26am, a man running down the beach carrying a huge dirty beach bag stopped right in front of us, obscuring our sunrise. He asked if we wanted him to take our picture. I demurred but he insisted, "Make a memory"! I thought we were already doing this! He took our photo and we missed the actual sunrise. Connie and I debated the experience. She argued "what a sweet older man" I took a less favorable view. But the next day, Connie was proven right, a theme of our marriage. The same grey breaded man ran down the beach carrying a wave-smashed boogie board. He was a sweet old man helping clean up the beach each morning. I wondered if some loss compelled him to suggest we preserve a memory?

I celebrate whenever I remember our national mall has a 30 foot statue of Rev. Dr Martin Luther King Jr. inscribed "Out of the mountain of despair, a stone of hope."

This week, I am celebrating that the US Soccer Team's leading goal scorer, Folarin Balogun was born in Brooklin, to Nigerian parents, whose flight back to London was cancelled due to pregnancy complications- a birthright American. On Wednesday, I celebrated as Mauricio Pochettino, our Argentinian coach, sang "Country Roads take me home to the place I belong, West Virginia Mountain Mama" (a song written by a guy from New Mexico) with gusto as our players, the children of every nation under heaven literally skipped across the pitch. These are small things, but joyful none the less.

I do not know what you are celebrating or lamenting today, surely we can do both. The Psalms remind us we can voice our always less than perfect prayers to God.

Scholars think Psalm 72 may be a coronation or inauguration prayer offered in the Temple for a new king. Despite a litany of failed and unfaithful Hebrew kings, the Psalmist hopes “this time, maybe we can get it right?” The Psalm begins

God, give your judgments to the king, the president, the mayor.

Give your righteousness (right actions) to the king's son.

Psalm 72 reminds the new leader of what God expects from them as a king, an administrator, president, governor, mayor or legislator. Scholars note that justice is the first, foremost and foundational organizing principle and requirement for a faith based ruler. Patrick Miller writes Psalm 72 “*calls us as citizens of God's realm to remind every human ruler, politician, and government that "the way to peace and well-being is found only when power assumes responsibility for justice and is clothed in compassion, regarding as precious and valuable the life of every citizen in the land."* Psalm 72 reminds us to remind our leaders it also reminds us to clothe ourselves in compassion, work for justice, and care for anyone in need. (Interpretation, A Biblical Commentary For Teaching and Preaching.)

What does it mean to be righteous or establish justice? Psalm 72 drills into the specific actions of kings, presidents, pastors or anyone with some power. Let us absorb Psalm 72 into our minds so we can use our power to bring about God's kingdom on earth as in heaven. Would we pray?

Give the king your justice, O God,

and your righteousness to a king's son.

Let the president judge your people with righteousness

and God's poor people with justice.

May our administrations defend the cause of the poor

Bring deliverance to the needy,

and crush oppression.

Let them save the children of those who are needy,

- If or when our hearts harden to children, even the children of enemies, we are losing touch with God. Jesus tells us heaven keeps special watch over children, (Matthew 18)

May our leaders words and deeds land like rain upon fresh-cut grass,

like showers that water the earth.
Let the righteous flourish,
and let peace prosper until the moon is no more.
May our leaders be blessed
because they deliver the needy who cry out,
the poor, and those who have no helper.
May all nations be blessed by them;
Lord help us elect leaders who embody compassion for the weak and the needy;
Let us judge politicians by the way they save the lives of those who are in need.
redeeming people from oppression and violence;
And knowing that everyone's blood is precious in God's eyes.
Long live such leaders!

Regularly praying Psalm 72 might ground us in how to live in these days, what to work for, what to treasure, what to help create right now on earth, how to treat our neighbors. After establishing justice for anyone in need as the foundation of righteous governance, the Psalmist longs for peace.

Let the mountains bring peace to the people;
let the hills bring righteousness.
let peace prosper until the moon is no more.

Saint Francis prayed “*Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.*” Jesus teaches us “*Blessed are the peacemakers, they are the children of God*” Jesus wept that his nation could never hold onto “*the things that make for peace*”. (Matthew 5 & Luke 19) In regards to peace. I love Zechariah's prayer for his son John's life work.

And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High,
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,
to give the people knowledge of salvation
by the forgiveness of their sins.
Because of the tender mercy of our God,
the dawn from on high will break upon us,
to shine upon those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the way of peace.” (Luke 1)

Oh let us never stop longing for peace. Let us never give up on peace. May peace-making be our core identity and mission. After praying for justice and peace the Psalmist longs for everyone to have enough of everything they need...

*May the mountains yield prosperity for the people,
and the hills, in righteousness.*

*May gold of Sheba be given to the king
May prayer be made for the king continually
and blessings invoked for them all day long.*

*May there be abundance of grain in the land;
may it wave on the tops of the mountains;
may its fruit be like Lebanon;
and may people blossom in the cities
like the grass of the field.*

It is no surprise that a coronation prayer calls for blessings upon the king. What may be a surprise is the biblical message, hidden within the Psalm but explicit in Jeremiah 29 *"But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare."* Jesus tells us, *"You know that the rulers of the gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. It must not be so among you, Instead whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant ."* (Matthew 20) Yes, America's deepest idolatry is materialism, and yes, the Prosperity Gospel and Christian Nationalism are abominations, but God wants everyone to have enough. God cares about everyone in need. God wants everyone to know plenty. God wants everyone to have healthcare, housing, enough to eat, meaning work. We need to pray and work that everyone might know plenty, that everyone has enough.

After praying for justice, peace and plenty the Psalmist prays that the king will prosper, scholars note not because of clever decisions or military might, but because they take care of people....

*Long live the king
Because they deliver the needy when they call,
the poor and those who have no helper.
They save the lives of the needy.
From oppression and violence...
Lord, may all the nations be blessed through our leaders and call them blessed.*

Any blessings on a nation are not rooted in divine right, but in the establishment of justice for all- for "everyone who has no helper". Dwell in that image. God is not America First, or Israel First any more than God is Canada First or Mexico First. God who created our borderless world wants all nations to be blessed, all children to be

defended, everyone to have enough to eat, to be healthy and safe. God wants all nations to care for children, the poor, and anyone who has no helper.

Finally, after praying for the government, Psalm 72 reminds us God is our hope- not any president, preacher, party or king. Psalm 72 gives words to our lament, our longing. Romans 8 speaks of God groaning with us “with sighs too deep for word”. Psalm 72 reminds us of what deeply matters in life: everyone.

*¹⁸ Bless the Lord God,
the only one who does wondrous things!*
*¹⁹ Bless God’s glorious name forever;
let God’s glory fill all the earth!*

Today, as we celebrate and lament,
Perhaps Psalm 72 might help us learn how to pray for our nation.
Pray with me

Oh God, who does wondrous things for all people
Creator, Christ, Holy Spirit
Show us mercy
Deepen our compassion
Help us see everyone’s needs
Empower us to do justice
Teach us to walk the paths to peace
Help us never let us give up on peace

End our tolerance of violence and desire for retribution
Raise up leaders committed to the poor and children in need
So that their words fall on the people like a gentle renewing rain
God give us enough, plenty enough for all
So that none are hungry, without healthcare, or without an advocate
And may God bless us and every nation
So that everyone everywhere might know peace, plenty and praise. amen