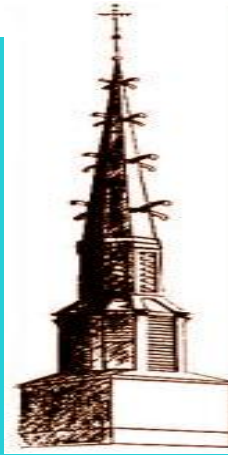
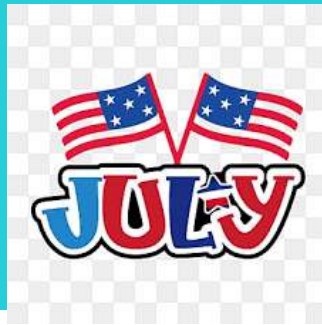


In this week's Steeple >>>

The Steeple

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July 3, 2025



The Weekly Newsletter of St. Luke's Episcopal Church



Praying for Our Nation: A Righteous Observance

As we prepare for fireworks this Friday, we in the Episcopal Church find ourselves, once again, navigating the delicate space between faithful citizenship and our deeper identity as members of Christ's body. The Fourth of July stirs in many of us a genuine love for country; intense gratitude for freedoms that have been hard-won, hopes for a better common life, all abreast the solemn remembrances of sacrifices made on our behalf by previous generations. And so, for people of faith, the question often arises: How do we rightly hold national observances like this in prayer without falling into the trap of a "nationalism" that is cloaked under the guise of Christianity.

We should begin where we always should, in prayer.

The 1979 Book of Common Prayer offers a rich witness to the way our Anglican tradition has held together love of country and love of God without confusing one for the other. In the section titled "Thanksgivings," we find a prayer *For the Nation* that reads:

Lord God Almighty, you have made all the peoples of the earth for your glory, to serve you in freedom and in peace: Give to the people of our country a zeal for justice and the strength of forbearance... (BCP, p. 258)

It's important to notice what we're doing when we pray this way: we are not sanctifying our nation as if it were holy in and of itself. Rather, we are praying that the people of this country might seek God's justice, practice God's peace, and walk humbly in service to something greater than ourselves.

This is not a breach of church and state. This is not blurring the lines between religion and politics. It is, instead, a faithful act of intercession, one that holds our country accountable to its best aspirations and invites its people into the reconciling work of God. I hope we can see the profound difference there.

So, where we do get confused? And where is discernment needed? Perhaps it is in the growing conflation between patriotic faith and Christian nationalism. Christian nationalism insists that America is not only special... but somehow chosen by God above others, and that Christianity should enjoy favored status within its laws and institutions. It baptizes national myths and often demonizes difference. It seeks dominance, not discipleship and that my friends, is a slippery slope.

Contrast those postures with the quiet dignity of our liturgical prayers that you know and love. The Collect for Independence Day asks not for conquest or superiority but for humility and justice:

Lord God Almighty...Grant that we and all the people of this land may have grace to maintain our liberties in righteousness and peace... (BCP, p. 242)

Christian nationalism, on the other hand, often draws out a different kind of energy as it speaks of power and control. Prayerful observance rather, speaks of grace and responsibility.

Here is an example - a prayer at the end of a civic celebration, asking for God's blessing on our leaders and for wisdom in policy decisions - that's a righteous observance. A church service draped in red, white, and blue where political slogans **replace** the gospel and allegiance to a party is equated with allegiance to Christ? That crosses a theological line...and we would do well to recognize that!

This is why, as Episcopalians, we give thanks for a prayer book that grounds us in the broad generosity of God's vision, a vision that transcends borders and binds all nations into one humanity under God. And it is why, at this time of year, we can and should pray for our country. Not because we think it is perfect, but precisely because it isn't. It is still young in the eyes of the world and it is evolving before our eyes. As it is and as it does, I recall that Abraham Lincoln once said, let us act "with malice toward none, with charity for all," praying not that God would bless our way, but that we might humbly walk in God's way.

In this spirit, I commend to you the prayers in our Book of Common Prayer for our nation, our leaders, and our common life. Use them. Sit with them. Let them guide you through the often bombastic grievances of national life. Hear me though... to be patriotic is not to be idolatrous. And to pray for our country is not to place it above God. Rather, it is to ask God to make of us a people who are wise, just, kind, and merciful. I don't know about you, but I want that for all of us.

Peace,

Nick+

At Luke's Place: July 4th – July 10th, 2025

July 4th Office Closed for Holiday

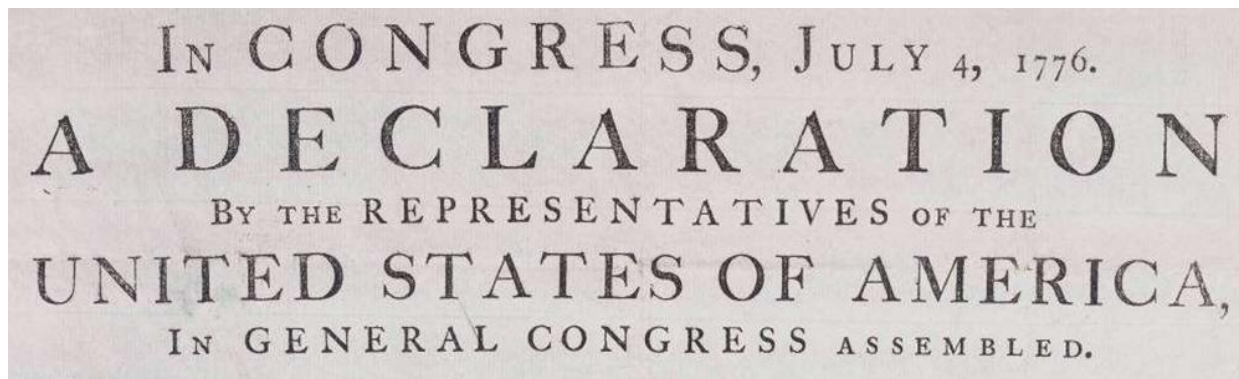
July 6th Holy Eucharist, Rite I, 8:00am, Chapel

Faith Forum, 9:15am, Metcalf

Holy Eucharist, Rite II, 10:30am, Nave

July 10th Men's Fellowship, 7am, Metcalf Hall

Green Country MP Eucharist, 1pm, GCV



Theologian's Corner: Independence Day

On 2 July 1776, the Continental Congress, comprising delegates sent by the legislatures of the thirteen colonies, voted to declare complete independence from British rule, and on 4 July the formal wording of the declaration was approved and the document signed.

The decision to seek independence rather than simply a restoration of the colonists' traditional rights as British subjects did not come readily or suddenly. Armies had been in the field for more than a year before the Declaration, and for another two years afterward. Nevertheless, the Declaration was rightly acknowledged as crucial. It speaks in terms of the Natural Law and we recognize the God-given principles of justice and right, in language that, as one (British) writer has said, combines great prose, great politics, and great theology.

The proper's of the day are consequential, challenging, and poignant.

First Reading: Deuteronomy 10:17-21 "When you have entered the homeland that God gives you, serve Him faithfully. Deal generously with the alien and the homeless, for you were homeless aliens in the land of Egypt."

The Psalm: 145 "One generation shall declare your works to another."

The Epistle: Hebrews 11:8-16 “Abraham and the other saints of old recognized that their true and abiding homeland is not on earth, but awaits them in Heaven.”

The Gospel: Matthew 5:43-48 "Love your enemies.... Your Father in Heaven makes the sun rise on the evil and the good...."

I wonder if in measuring ourselves as a nation up against these readings what the Spirit might reveal to us?

Together we pray: Lord God Almighty, in whose Name the founders of this country won liberty for themselves and for us, and lit the torch of freedom for nations then unborn: Grant that we and all the people of this land may have grace to maintain our liberties in righteousness and peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Prayer List

Please pray for: Ben Baker, Steve McCraw, Josh Harris, David Swindell, Connie Finch, Terry Grogan, Tyler Roberson, Jerry Nezam, Miriam Petrovich, Lynette Beebe, Jack Smith, Danny Clem, David McAtee, Shawn, Stephanie Gallegos, Pat Sare, Steve Linn, Jean Mason, Adam Thomas, Tom Oakes, Bill Pendley, Mary Wallace, Lynda Stephens, Marcie Zervas, Audrey Harris, Peggy Rockey, Lauren Barlowe, Ken Harvey, Nan Buhlinger, Bill Birk, Carol McSpadden, Dionna Cameron, Betty Rogers, David Anderson, Dan & JoAnn Gallery, Freda Bretz, Kathleen Turner, Susan Dick, Steve Clark, Sue Sherrill, and Lauren Gandy.

**Please add the following to your prayers for the Third Week of Pentecost
St Luke's, Ada Grace, Muskogee The Church of the Province of Myanmar (Burma)**

Birthdays and Anniversaries July 6th – July 12th, 2025

Birthdays



**Dolores McCreary (7/8)
Emily Almy (7/11)**



Anniversaries

Tom & Keeli Droege (7/7)

If your or a loved one's name doesn't appear on the list, please email or call the office, and we will add your birthday or anniversary!

BREAD OF LIFE



One of the things that Janice and I loved to do was to bake and cook for others. After we first got married, Janice remembered her mother would buy loaves of bread ready to put in a pan and bake. We both remembered the aroma that filled the air of freshly baked bread. We purchased loaves and baked them ourselves until we both started looking into making our own. The way you begin with bread completely reshapes your view of how to make it, not to mention what recipe to use.

I remember my mother had an aluminum bowl with a 30" in diameter and was about 10" deep. She would make 10 to 20 loaves at a time. I'll never forget the phone conversation I had with her when I called to get her recipe. She laughed and explained that it's a dump, pour and feel recipe. We must have talked over and over about how to get things just right.

The first couple of batches were interesting. After that I got the feeling of what to look for. Janice and I worked together and made different types of bread after that. The best one was what she called PSRT bread. It was her musical bread. She figured if they could write a song about it, we could make bread about it. PSRT stood for parsley, sage, rosemary and thyme. Of course, I'm talking about Simon and Garfunkel's song, "Scarborough Fair". It was the best for garlic bread or any Italian meal that we would make, including spaghetti.

We made other bread including onion, grape nut wheat, wheat, garlic, and of course just plain ole white bread. Janice's father often commented, "The whiter the bread, the faster your dead." So, it was no surprise that his favorite bread was wheat or grape nut wheat. Yeah, that's grape nut cereal mixed in the bread! We had fun making braided bread, buns, cinnamon rolls, lefse, and so much more.

Since bread has been around for a millennium, it made me want to investigate the bible. One night I went looking for information on bread recipes that were used back then and are no longer found. I was reminded of Ezekiel when he went into the desert for 390 days and existed on just bread and water. That type of bread is now known as "Ezekiel's Bread".

After doing more research, I found so many different recipes for this bread. And after much consideration, I have come across a recipe that I think is the closest to what Ezekiel may have made. To start with, you must make the bread flour. This is done by grinding hard white wheat (for me, that would be the spring wheat we grow here), spelt (now this is a harder wheat that I think would be like the durum wheat from North Dakota), hulled barley, millet, lentils, red kidney beans, and pinto beans. These would all be ground into the flour to be used to make the bread with.

I love challenges, so this will be something I will be doing in the future. All the nutrients to survive on for 390 days with only water to wash it down with. Now that's just the flour, the rest of the ingredients could include egg, olive oil, butter, or avocado (your choice), milk (goat, camel or cow), yeast (fermented drink of your choice) and honey to sweeten. While doing this, I'll remember what my mother told me, "It's a feel of the dough to make it just right".

Just like life, we change our path every now and then to suit our purpose. The one thing we should return to again and again is, "the feel of the path... to make sure it's the right path. For what remains true is that we carve a path of joy for ourselves and for everyone we encounter on the journey if we take the time to return to what is right. There will be days that you will be alone just like Ezekiel was, but you always come back to catch up with the ones around you and some you just meet by happenstance.

As you enjoy this Fourth of July, remember those that you love and see no longer and those that you never knew that worked to keep you safe from all harm. Enjoy those hot dogs, hamburgers and all the accoutrements that go with them. While you are nourishing yourself with this food, think of the simpler time when we didn't have all the choices we have today.

This year, I am going back to the basics and enjoy life the way it used to be. Living simply but enjoying it completely. Remembering the gatherings I enjoyed growing up and wishing I could be there to enjoy them with my family again. With moving my business home and getting other things done, I must spend this time alone getting things done. In the future I will be able to spend more time like I want to, for now, I think I might make a batch of Ezekiel's Bread and enjoy life as simply as I can to get things done. May the Lord find you in his Peace and enjoyment of the life he has given all of us to live. You are all in my heart and prayers as we celebrate the companionship whenever possible.

Robert

The Glebe House-Birthplace of American Episcopacy



- Location: 49 Hollow Road, Woodbury, Connecticut 06798.
- History: The house, built around 1740, was the home of Woodbury's first Anglican minister, Reverend John Rutgers Marshall, and his family. It played a significant role in the establishment of the Episcopal Church in the New World, hosting a secret meeting in 1783 where the first Episcopal election in the United States took place. It was later restored in the 1920s and opened as one of the earliest historic house museums in the country in 1925. The museum is celebrating its 100th year in operation in 2025.

St. Luke's Vestry Members

- Nancy Woods, Sr. Warden – Nancywoods120@gmail.com
- Sherry Deason – deason_s@yahoo.com
- Karole Cozby, Jr Warden – kscozby916@gmail.com
- Chad Ellis – w.chadwick.ellis@gmail.com
- Karen Lewey – kgrammy07@yahoo.com
- Laura Birk – lpbirk73@gmail.com
- Steve Heidorn- sgheidorn@yahoo.com
- Dolores McCreary – dolomc37@gmail.com
- Steve Roper- sdroper2006@yahoo.com
- Fred Whitson- sandyswhit@gmail.com
- Robert Lonski- rjtazski@yahoo.com

Bereavement Team 1

**Susie Clark, Nancy Woods,
Jeanne Julstrom, Sally Lindsey,
and Darian Kedy**

St. Luke's Episcopal Church Contacts:

The Reverend Nick Phares, Rector
269-788-7063; RevPhares@outlook.com

Keeli Droege, Choir Director/Organist
918-697-8509 keelidroege@gmail.com



St. Luke's Episcopal Church
210 East 9th St., Bartlesville, OK 74003
Office Hours: 9am-4pm, M-F
Email: StLukesBartlesville@outlook.com
918-336-1212
Or contact
Penny Williams, secretary 918-766-2157