

From the Pastor's Desk

America the Beautiful

The Statue of Liberty was a gift given by the people of France to the people of the United States on October 28, 1886. Inscribed on it are the words:

**“Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to be free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed, to me;
I lift my torch beside the golden door.”**

These words of invitation expressed the hopes and yearnings of the millions who passed by the statue after their long journey across the Atlantic Ocean to the hope of a new life in America. From 1892-1954 seventeen million people passed through Ellis Island. For most of us our ancestors made this journey.*

Having recently celebrated Independence Day, it is important for us to remember that the words engraved on Lady Liberty were not just for our ancestors who came so far and endured so much, but they are still for us today.

Regardless of how our ancestors arrived in America, they are not past history, their hopes and dreams are part of our genes and woven into the fabric of our lives. We are the beneficiaries of their courage and the inheritors of the promise engraved on that great statue. And now, today, we are the stewards of that promise.

If we listen we can hear from deep in our souls faint echoes of their cries for a new life. Perhaps it is only when we acknowledge that it is our story too that we can begin to identify with the millions around the world who also yearn to pursue their dreams just as our ancestors did and we do today. Far too often we take these dreams for granted and sometimes clutch them possessively and exclusively as our own, fearing that today's immigrants will destroy our way of life. Yet, the genetics of the United States is immigration. Yesterday's immigrants are today's successful citizens who are grateful for the opportunities our country provided. This cycle is what America is all about.

The words engraved on that great statue sound amazingly like those of Jesus that are recorded in Matthew's Gospel:

**“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.
Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart,
and you will find rest for your souls.”**

Matthew 11:29-30

A central characteristic of the life and ministry of Jesus was that he offered “rest” to the “tempest-tossed” and “wretched refuse” of his day. Whether it was the lepers who were ostracized by dehumanizing religious sanctions; or the blind and lame who were relegated to beg by the city gates; or Gentiles and Samaritans who were considered by the religious crowd as little more than dogs; or the Roman occupiers who were regarded as enemies to be despised; or women and children who occupied the lowest levels on the social totem pole; or prostitutes, tax collectors and the demon-possessed, Jesus never lost sight of their humanity. To a person he reached across fearful and forbidden social and religious boundaries to embrace and affirm the humanity of each and include them in his ever-widening circle of relationships. He conveyed to them that they were loved beyond measure with a divine love. Those of us who follow Jesus are called to do the same.

The words on the base of the huge 300 foot Statue of Liberty challenge us to a certain heart and mind-set of openness. In light of current issues such as immigration reform, racism and marriage equality, it would be helpful to reflect again on her words:

**“Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to be free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed, to me;
I lift my torch beside the golden door.”**

In 1892 Brenden Graham wrote the lyrics of the song “Isle of Hope, Isle of Tears”. The music group “Celtic Women” have made it a popular song today. It tells the story of Annie Moore from Ireland, a fifteen year old girl who was the first to cross the threshold of Ellis Island one hundred and twenty three years ago.

On the first day of January,
eighteen ninety-two,
they opened Ellis Island and they let
the people through.
And the first to cross the threshold
of that isle of hope and tears,
was Annie Moore from Ireland
who was only fifteen years.

Isle of hope, isle of tears,
isle of freedom, isle of fears,
but it's not the isle you left
behind. That isle of hunger, isle of pain,
isle you'll never see again

the Isle of home is always on your mind.

In a little bag she carried
all her past and history,
and her dreams for the future
in the land of liberty.
And courage is the passport
when your old world disappears,
but there's no future in the past when you're
fifteen years.

When they closed down Ellis Island
in nineteen forty-three,
Seventeen million people

Had come there for sanctuary.
And in springtime when I
came here
And I stepped onto it's piers,
I thought of how it must have been
When you're fifteen years.

Isle of hope, isle of tears,
Isle of freedom, isle of fears,
But it's not the isle you left behind.
That isle of hunger, isle of pain,
Isle you'll never see again.
But the isle of home is always on your mind.

Click here for a link to watch Celtic Women perform "Isle of Hope, Isle of Tears" : <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pDThVsJdnFI>

~PB

*Information for this article came from Pastor Joseph Holub's blog "Spiritual Trails".