

“This Is My Country” song by Fred Waring and His Pennsylvanians is my favorite patriotic song. I was a teenager growing up in Florida a segregated South and when I first heard this song, for the first time I felt that this country would one day belong to me also. It energized me to work to make the words true.

I sat in, picketed, marched, demonstrated, wrote in local newspapers and spoke up on my journey to bring change to America. In high school, I remember that we had to take a civics course, “Americanism vs Communism”. Mr. Rudolph V. Gripper was the teacher, and each week on Friday, he had a current events session. Students had to present and defend a news article while being grilled by fellow students. It was a tough and at times a fun session. Of course, your buddies were the toughest on you. From that class, I became a newshound. I have maintained a love for news of what is happening in the world to this day.

I have been fortunate too, while in a flying outfit in the Air Force, to see and spend time in some of the places I reported news from. I’ve been to England, Scotland, Germany, Iceland, Philippines, Guam, Labrador, Canada, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Thailand, Mexico, Japan, Okinawa, and of course Vietnam.

Many may not realize it, but America’s military men and women are ambassadors. The people in the foreign countries in which we are stationed learn America from us. We are especially kind to kids and contribute money, manpower and our time to helping kids have better lives. Even in Vietnam, we volunteered/worked with and in orphanages. Some even adopted kids and brought them to the US. This still goes on.

From all my experiences and travels in the world, I still think the United States of America is the best place in the world to live. We have free education, some free medical care, we can drink the water throughout the US and feel safe to eat in any restaurant, knowing that it has passed a health inspection.

We have electricity 24 hours a day, we have libraries that will let us check out and take books home. We have television 24 hours a day, with numerous channels (free and cable) and of course there is the internet. With modern

technology we can see the person we are talking too from our phones or computers.

We can drive, fly, go by rail or by bus to get to most points in the US. There are gas stations and rest areas on most routes. Even the airports have restaurants and areas you can use while you wait for your flight.

Yes, the United States is a great place to live in and to call home. But now America is troubled. COVID 19 has changed the way we are living. We are only 4% of the world's population but we have 24% of the COVID 19 cases. We are quarantined at home, there are countries in which we are unwelcome, they are afraid we will bring the virus to them. We don't know if it is going to be safe to let our children go back to the classroom.

Even more unthinkable, we can't go to church. However, with the great array of technology we are able to see and attend some form of church service.

Don't think America has been brought to its knees, in time we will recover and find a new normal. In our lifetime we have experienced a cure for polio and even as the Ebola Virus raged in Africa, our scientist and medical personnel worked side by side with others to treat and care for those effected by Ebola. CDC (Center for Disease Control) worked with the World Health Organization (WHO), health organizations, scientist and medical personnel from other countries to arrest the Ebola Virus and find a cure for this certain death virus.

Ebola was contained and did not reach America. We did though have some American become infected while fighting the virus. They were normally flown home to the US, treated at special hospitals and quarantined for a while. There was no threat to the normal citizen. Our government acted quickly to intervene and work with others in dealing with the Ebola Virus. Not only did we provide personnel, but we provided equipment and supplies.

Right now, the US is in a disorganized frenzy: Open Up. Oops, you opened too soon. The Virus will disappear in days. Not so, it's spreading throughout the US. Even sparsely populated states like Wyoming, the Dakotas, and Montana have seen an increase in their COVID 19 cases.

What can we do? Wear the mask, social distance, wash your hands, don't cough or sneeze in the direction of others. If you are sick, have a temperature

and/or having difficulty in breathing seek medical care. If possible, you and your family get tested and avoid being in large crowds.

Looking at the past and modern-day experiences with illnesses, our country has found a way to treat and live with most of them. We still don't have a vaccine for HIV/AIDS, but people are living better and longer. There are some sicknesses that still baffle scientist and the medical field, but they still keep plugging along, and occasionally they find something that offers a glimmer of help and hope.

During this time, I have been doing some reading and I have found a book: "A Portrait of Jesus" written by a Catholic priest, Joseph F. Girzone. I think it is an easy reading and it looks at Jesus as a person. He gives his idea of what Jesus may have been thinking and also a reason for why he did some of the things he did. There is excellent information on Jesus as the Good Shepherd.

Of the stories in the Bible, I have been curious why the Jews continued to discriminate against the Samaritans. When the Hebrew nation was a divided country, Israel was the northern country with Samaria as its capitol. Judah was the southern country with Jerusalem as its capitol. Both countries were captured by foreign powers. (1)

The Northern Kingdom was captured by Assyria. The Assyrians took the educated people and replaced them with other people from countries they had conquered. There was not the mass deportation as was to occur in Judah. Most people remained in place, but there was intermarriage and a lost of the faith.

Later, the Babylonians conquered both the Northern and Southern Kingdom. They destroyed the temple in Jerusalem and many people in Judah fled the country. They knew what had happened in the Northern Kingdom under rule of Assyria.

Most of the time we read of the Babylonian exile it is about the Southern Kingdom. Many of the people were deported to Babylon, but they tried to worship and keep the faith mostly guided by the prophets.

When the exile was over the people returned to both the Northern Kingdom and the Southern Kingdom. When the Jews in the Southern Kingdom, Judah

began to rebuild the temple, the Jews from the Northern Kingdom, Israel, sent some workers to help rebuild the temple they were refused and declared unclean because they had bent to the rule of the captors by intermarriage and not maintaining the practice of their faith.

The word for me that explained the fracture between the Jews in Jerusalem, the Southern Kingdom and the Jews in the Northern Kingdom, Israel, is **excommunication**. For me, this makes it easy for me to understand.

The Jews in Jerusalem wanted nothing to do with the Jews in Samaria. Yet the scripture in the Bible shows that Jesus was inclusive of them. There is the story of the Woman at the Well and the story of the Good Samaritan. Both are people discriminated against, yet Jesus shows himself to be the Good Shepherd wanting only what is good for the sheep.

He sees himself as taking care of the sheep, seeking out those who are separated, hurt, sick and in need of safety. He wants to lift them onto his shoulders and bear their burdens and concerns. Remember we too are his sheep.

When I started this chat, I talked about my life in a country that didn't act as it was for me, it wasn't my country. However, through the years of traveling, meeting people and watching this country go through some changes. We have come a long way.

A Chinese philosopher said, "A journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step." What he didn't say, but I am sure you understand: **You gotta keep stepping!**

Like the Civil Rights leader, John Lewis, I've gotten into good trouble and because of it, my Christian faith, and the people I've met throughout the years, I can with boldness declare that this is my country!

(1) Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary

The book: A Portrait of Jesus by Joseph F. Girzone can be purchased online from Alibris.

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