

Steeple News

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Our Two Invitations

"Come follow me." These welcoming words of Jesus brought a better life and a brighter hope to the discouraged and downtrodden of his day, and they have done the same for millions more in the centuries since he spoke that invitation.

There is another invitation from a different time that has also brought hope to those who suffer in poverty, prejudice and bondage. It is the one engraved on the Statue of Liberty: "Give me your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, the wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me, I lift my lamp beside the golden door." Like the words of Jesus, these words have also invited people to change their lives and destinies.

Many who followed the Christ believed the rewards would be worth the price and knew there would be a cost associated with their discipleship. Likewise, those who create their fate and future with this land of freedom find that freedom isn't free. Happiness isn't handed out, and even the golden door is a door of opportunity that must be pushed open.

The founding fathers pledged their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor so that we who followed would have an opportunity to pursue happiness. Whether we find it is up to us. And so, both invitations require something more than just wanting to be free, and happy, and blessed. Desire, faith and hard work are necessary.

Jesus told his disciples that they were "the light of the world". Here, again, is a similarity to the promise of America. The lamp lifted by that golden door is not a single torch atop a statue. That is only a symbol of a combined flame of millions of Americans lifting a light of hope to the world to join with us in pursuing freedom and dignity for all mankind.

Perhaps in the last analysis the two invitations are one. Jesus said, "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it abundantly." No people in history have ever savored such an abundant life as Americans have. But more than material prosperity are the love of God and the respect for one another that are essential to any successful society. These are the services and sacrifices required of those who would follow Jesus, and they are the same works that will keep the torch of liberty burning brightly in this blessed land.

This is my attempt to embrace positive words in a world which seems to need it.

Rev. Hans Lillejord