

“AMERICA THE GREAT” by Paul Harvey

Half an hour north of Phoenix, Arizona is the tiny town of Cave Creek. It is the oldest town in that state. Once a stage stop between Fort McDowell and Wickenburg, Cave Creek, by choice, never grew up. On a dusty desert hilltop overlooking Harold's Corral and Horny-Toad Cafe is a tiny Baptist church with much significance in my life. I returned one recent summer Sunday to find that the old folding chairs had been replaced by cushioned pews, but otherwise the church is essentially unchanged. If there is yet a remnant of Mayberry in the U.S.A., it is Cave Creek, Arizona.

The widow Lydia had walked the hot, dusty road to the hilltop church. The subject of special prayer was a local girl, Terri Lynch, who had been stomped by her horse. For this 4th of July service, the local American Legion post supplied a color guard. The hymnals were edited by John Peterson. Just to speak his name is to set your heart singing "It Took a Miracle of Love and Grace." There was no way the feeble air conditioner could keep up with the 112° desert heat; yet the congregation of 100-plus were all typically neat despite the heat. The preacher this occasion was a Marine chaplain home on leave. He talked about that day on Iwo Jima, when our war-weary Marines looked up and saw on the summit of Suribachi the American flag against the Pacific sky; it meant that their mission had been accomplished; Iwo Jima was secured; victory was ours. He likened that symbol to the cross on Calvary.

Here is a tiny church on a barren hilltop, and Angel and I were re-visiting the America that once was. And suddenly I was angered that there was a larger world out there, under the same flag, where rude malcontents are hiding behind our Constitution while setting fire to it, where radio and television from that other world rudely intrude on this one, imposing diluted values, where enormous cities have everything and demand more, where individuals put the blame for drugs and disease and crime on everybody but themselves and demand more money for more things from taxes from the widow Lydia, who, because she does not have a car any more, walks the hot, dusty, pot-holed road to church, uncomplaining. "What a shame," I thought, "that these willingly grow the crops and fight the wars and do the jobs and pay the taxes that pay the bills for so many who are so utterly ungrateful." I was pondering how God has so often used the simple folk to confound the wise.

And I was remembering the admonition of the French soldier-statesman de Tocqueville. Remember, he returned from our country to his to report, "I sought the greatness of America in its great factories, and it was not there. I sought the greatness of America in its fields and its forests, in its cities and its seaports, and it was not there. It was not until I looked into the churches of America and heard her pulpits flame with righteousness did I realize that America is great because she is good. And if America ever ceases to be good, America will cease to be great."

Attending the small Cave Creek, Arizona church during the 4th of July week, I was savoring what I am sad to describe as old-fashioned PATRIOTISM, which permeated the service. During my travels I find American tradition diminished or enhanced in direct

proportion to my distance from the big city. The megalopolis is likely to be more barbaric than sophisticated; hinterland America is still populated by patriots. Our nation's population includes fewer than three million working farmers any more. And yet this tiny fraction has kept the rest of us from drowning in red ink. No American makes a more tangible contribution than the one we can see and sell or save and eat. Yet major city media have been force-feeding provincial folk with daily doses of cynicism about God and country. And I am pondering this diabolical discrimination against our nation's hardest-working minority as the service in my tiny church on the hill overlooking Cave Creek drew toward a close, with the little electric organ playing "My Country, 'Tis of Thee." Over the music, a voice was reading these words:

"Suppose one day our civilization were destroyed and our cities laid waste. Suppose in 20,000 years, an archaeologist from another time were poking around in the ruins of your city. If he should dig up just one penny, he would know so much about us! The coin, a blend of metals, would tell him that we were miners, that we understood the science of metallurgy. By the perfect-circle shape of the coin, he would deduce that we understood geometry. The wheat on the back of the penny would tell him that we were a great agricultural society, that our fine crops were a major source of our wealth. The date on the face of the coin would show him that we understood arithmetic and had a calendar. The portrait of Lincoln would mark us as artists who had an advanced culture. The words UNITED STATES would let him know that we were a federated group of local communities bound together by a strong central government. The phrase E PLURIBUS UNUM would tell him that we were scholars who knew foreign languages. The word LIBERTY on the face of the penny would let the archaeologist know that our country sought to guarantee freedom for every man. And finally, the phrase IN GOD WE TRUST would confirm that we had a moral law. And it would let the archaeologist know that we had grown strong and mighty WITH GOD LEADING.

And then, just considering that penny, he would have to wonder "WHY DID THEY EVER GO ASTRAY?"

Paul Harvey News, Saturday, 14 July 1990

Transcribed by Antone Grieco 1426 Broadway, Chico, CA 95928