Covenant of Remembrance

“My son’s name shall be Joseph Warren Revere.”  The famous American icon, Paul Revere, may have stated words like this when his son was born on April 30, 1777.1 In the midst of the revolution, with so many war heroes and friends, why would he choose the name of Joseph Warren?

Dr. Joseph Warren was a Boston contemporary of Revere, and arguably his best friend. Together the two colonists, bound by patriotism and friendship, fought the tyranny of the crown up until Warren’s death at Bunker Hill. Less than two years after the death of his close friend, Revere’s son was born. In an act of remembrance and honor, he christened his son, Joseph Warren Revere. Paul Revere memorialized his dear friend’s life and sacrifice, even when others forgot his legacy in the annals of history.

            As well as anyone, Revere knew the contribution to the colonies, and to the founding of America, of Joseph Warren. The thirty-four-year-old physician had been commissioned to be a major general, but fought as a regular soldier. He led farmers and fathers on a hill outside Boston until finally giving his *last full measure of devotion*.  At the time of his death, Warren served as the chairman of the Committee of Safety as well as the President of the Massachusetts Provincial Congress.  One year following the Battle of Bunker Hill, Joseph’s colleagues met in Philadelphia. With flowing curves and timeless ink, they signed the Declaration of Independence. Warren’s name is absent from the declaration, but those present knew he had signed it with his blood.

             Dr. Warren lit the fuse that started America’s War for Independence. The evening before the confrontations at Lexington, Concord and Menotomy, Warren summoned Revere and William Dawes to his home. In Dr. Warren’s house, Revere learned of his role to notify the countryside.  Neither Warren nor Revere could imagine that the one coordinating and leading the cause would be forgotten, while the other would ride into the history books of a new nation.

            Joseph Warren’s words during an oration delivered March 5, 1772, in commemoration of the Boston Massacre, reflected his conviction to the heavenly covenant upon this land. He declared, “May we ever be a people favored of GOD.  May our land be a land of liberty, the seat of virtue, the asylum of the oppressed, a name and praise in the whole earth.” 2

             In March 1775, Warren spoke at the five-year anniversary of the Boston Massacre. In this speech, given just weeks before the shot heard around the world, Dr. Warren issued a famous challenge to his countrymen that has oft been repeated through the generations. In 1981, in President Ronald Reagan’s first inaugural address, he said: “On the eve of our struggle for independence a man who might have been one of the greatest among the Founding Fathers, Dr. Joseph Warren, … said to his fellow Americans, ‘Our country is in danger, but not to be despaired of... On you depend the fortunes of America. You are to decide the important questions upon which rests the happiness and liberty of millions yet unborn. Act worthy of yourselves.” 3

            Dr. Warren’s words applied in 1775, they were needed in 1981 and they must guide us through America’s 250th anniversary and beyond.

            Those last four words, “act worthy of yourselves,” are noble words. They were first quoted by an American that has often been forgotten, but they represent the sacred covenant that Americans must always remember … to act worthy of ourselves!

           As beneficiaries of so much it is only right that we covenant to remember those that have given much, and those that have given all, for the blessings we enjoy.  Paul Revere was true to his covenant of remembrance, and now we as Americans must be also.

Essayist – Jeffery J. McKenna

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**End Notes**

1 Hurwitz, Mark, (2020) “This Old Pew: #54 – Joseph Warren Revere,” The Old North Church and Historical Site.

2 Warren, Joseph. An Oration; Delivered March 5, 177.  At the Request of the Inhabitants of the Town of Boston; to Commemorate the Bloody Tragedy of the Fifth of March, 1770. 2nd ed.  Boston: Edes and Gill by order of the town of Boston, 1772.  Reprinted many times both during the Revolutionary era and in collections of the Massacre Orations through the mid-nineteeth century.

3 Warren, Joseph. An Oration; Delivered March 6, 1775: At the Request of the Inhabitants of the Town of Boston; to Commemorate the Bloody Tragedy of the Fifth of March, 1770. Boston: Edes and Gill, Joseph Greenleaf, 1775. The original handwritten manuscript is in the John Collins Warren Papers. Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, Massachusetts, Ms. N-1731, Box 1a.