



Any child growing up in the Midwest was familiar with the phrase “knee high by the Fourth of July.” It was a small rhyme that allowed each farm family to measure the possible success of their fall crop. If the spring-planted corn was as tall as an adult’s knee, the likelihood the crop would be successful by fall was high. If spring rains had delayed corn planting and the corn plants stood less than an adult’s knee, there would be great anxiety that there might not be enough growing season left to produce a crop.

Even as a child, the Fourth of July was not so much a party or celebration, but a time to pause mid-summer and see how we as a farm family were measuring up. How were the crops doing? Did we have a significant weed problem? Were the crops getting enough rain? And come fall, would we be able to pay the bills?

Sure, there were parades, flags, and fireworks, but there was also family-wide reflection.

Peter Marshall was a Scottish-born Presbyterian minister, who from an early age made it his goal to emigrate to the U.S. He went on to become a popular pastor in Washington, D.C., and ultimately served as chaplain for the U.S. Senate. He was a somber man and had a somber take on this word "freedom" used so abundantly in his new country: "May we think of freedom, not as the right to do as we please, but as the opportunity to do what is right."

On this Fourth of July, may we reflect and take measure of our country, our university, our families, and our individual actions. And may we, in this, the most unusual of times, choose to do what is right when it comes to the pandemic, the injustices we see around us, and the way in which we treat our neighbors.

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