Bending the Arc

I haven't seen it firsthand. Honestly, I don't have the stomach for it, but I have heard all about the "spectacular light displays of America's glorious history" projected simultaneously onto all four sides of the entire height of the Washington Monument. They've been running every evening, with narration broadcast over loudspeakers, since the new year began. It's part of the celebration of the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence.

The story the administration is telling with "proper ideology" is one that uses light as a metaphor for power, from the first glimmers of the ships of Columbus, through all the "best" inventions of the "greatest" minds in the world. It's about expansion. Taking what is "rightfully" ours.

The funny thing is, there's no mention of the Declaration of Independence. If I were a dictator, I wouldn't want anyone to talk about that. It might give people … you know… "ideas." Ideas that might not help me out.

The "spectacle" — which required all 37 special projectors that existed in the US, plus three more flown in from abroad —left out a lot of moments that define, exemplify and even challenge who we claim to be. Things like the people who were here before Europeans, immigration, the Civil War, the Civil Rights movement. Abraham Lincoln. And of course, Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., whose birthday and life accomplishments will be celebrated on Monday.

MLK Day is one of twelve legal federal holidays. In theory nobody — not even the president who acts like a dictator — can change a legal federal holiday without the approval of Congress. Of course, he's also not supposed to be able to force national museums, arts and culture organizations into partisan politics of "proper ideology." But he is. And getting away with it. Backed by his "Department of War," which technically, legally is still the Department of Defense and Veterans Affairs, even though using that name will get you into trouble.

Honestly, I've never quite known how to "celebrate" holidays like MLK Day, Juneteenth, Veterans Day, Memorial Day, Independence Day, or even Thanksgiving. They are all so packed with complex, often horrifying, histories that to me, they are days of somber recognition. The parties, picnics and fireworks of those days always seem more about having a day off than actually recognizing anyone or anything.

I hope next year we aren't prevented from celebrating MLK Day, but I could see it happening. The way we were expected to elevate Charlie Kirk as a saint of liberty after he was murdered. We must celebrate this man, and his day, as a day that reminds us of what really matters: taking responsibility for the direction of this country, and how we bend the moral arc of the universe.

In Peace,
Rev Denis