

Sermon – Proper 9 July 3 – Cathedral of the Incarnation

Independence Day Weekend

On this July 4 weekend we celebrate our independence, and remember the troubled times of 240 years ago when the acts of a colonial master resulted in the rebellion of those leaders of the colonies that felt their allegiance to King George III and the British Parliament had run its course. Despite a genuine effort to reconcile with Britain further defiant acts by King George III resulted in a vote by the first continental congress to sever ties and become an independent country.

240 years later we are witnessing Great Britain this time declare it's desire to be independent again, freeing itself from the constraints of the European Union. The vote a week or so ago seemed to come as a shock to many, including those that supported leaving the EU. The shock waves resulted in chaos within the ranks of both major political parties and the predictable stock market and currency market falls that always come when the world experiences shock.

It probably shouldn't have come as a huge surprise as nationalism, the belief that nations will benefit from acting independently rather than collectively, has been on the rise throughout the world. The world itself seems to ebb and flow through these periods of nationalism and then periods of collectivism, through periods of independence and periods of interdependence.

In 1962, in the midst of the Cold War, that followed WWII and the Korean War, President Kennedy gave a speech on July 4 in the Hall of Independence in Philadelphia that recounted the birth of the nation from revolution. He made note that the resulting structure of the federal government and the state government had a natural check and balance against a central authority.

President Kennedy noted that it was his task, and the task of State Governors to "weave from all these tangled threads a fabric of law and progress." In essence he was saying that to live in a free democracy means that all sides have to work together for the betterment of the whole. The Constitution of the United States sought to enshrine "not independence but interdependence" he said, "not the individual liberty of one but the indivisible liberty of all."

The purpose of President Kennedy's speech, which has been called the "Declaration of Interdependence," was to draw people to the ideals of the Constitution and the benefits of interdependence. The spirit of effort required for interdependence was being played out across the Atlantic as the founding countries of the European Union sought to put individual differences aside to pursue interdependence with the aim of creating a stronger union. He recounted that Alexander Hamilton reminded New Yorkers to "think continentally" but now he reminded the country to "think intercontinentally." The message then was relevant and today I feel it is similarly relevant as pressure mounts on us to support withdrawing from the world again.

The essence of interdependence is at the heart of our gospel and is at the heart of our church. As Christians we hold dearly to the fact that we live in an interdependent relationship with God, and that Jesus Christ showed us the way to live in unity with each other and with God. In the gospel account from Luke today we hear that Jesus commissioned seventy followers to go out into the world, not as independent contractors, but as interdependent teams. He sent them out as ambassadors to prepare the way for Jesus message of love and he sent them out with no resources other than the gospel message, instructing them to rely on the kindness of strangers. In other words he sent them out to form relationships with those that welcomed them and to accept their hospitality, in essence becoming interdependent with them as they sought to change the world.

This was the first act of a new church, a new gathering of people that followed the way of Jesus. The church has been sending out people ever since. When the disciples returned they were full of joy for what they had experienced. Now if you and I went out and demons submitted to us we might be pretty joyful too. But Jesus reminded them not to rejoice at their acts but rejoice out of knowledge that their efforts are known to God. God calls us to continually be engaged in the taking out of Jesus' message into the world.

Last weekend I had the privilege of witnessing God's work in a part of the world I've never been to before. I had been invited to the 144th Convocation of the Diocese of South Dakota which was meeting in Eagle Butte, on the Cheyenne River Reservation. I was invited to represent our Diocese and Bishop at the ordination of a new priest Mikayla Dunfree. For those that were at our convention last year Mikayla and Bishop Tarrant of South Dakota were present to receive a gift of \$300,000 from the Redeemer Fund. Redeemer was a church in Brooklyn that was closed a couple of years ago and sold for \$21m. A tithe fund was created and \$2.1m was distributed to Diocese across the world. The Diocese of Long Island and the Dioceses of South Dakota, Liberia, Guinea, Bo (in Sierra Leone), Navajoland, Haiti, Torit (South Sudan), Ecuador Central, and Cape Coast in West Africa, are now interdependent in ways greater than they were before.

It was great to be able to be on the ground and listen to the stories of the Lakota elders, the youth and the priests and deacons of that diocese. I was able to appreciate that prior to Mikayla's ordination there had been one priest for Cheyenne River Ministries that covers the 8,500 people that reside on 4,267 sq. miles of the reservation, most of which identify as Episcopalians. One priest to provide pastoral support to an impoverished community with the highest rate of youth suicide in the country. One priest to carry out a funeral a week that involves attending a three day wake and an all-day funeral. One priest to provide Holy Communion to ten or more congregations each month.

The funds our Diocese provided will fund Mikayla's position for three years. They will then require another gift, and then another, and then another. The population lives with the intergenerational trauma of their past, the trauma of chronic unemployment, the trauma of drugs and alcohol addiction and the continued worry that the government will cut critical funding for their community. Our church is never going to fix these deep problems but through our relationship and through telling their stories we can support the gospel ministry and walk

with the people of the Diocese of South Dakota as they seek to survive. Without this interdependence, without the ties that bind us together in our work, these people may not experience the love of Christ and the concern of the world.

When the disciples returned from their journey into the countryside they were filled with joy for they experienced the impact of their ministry to the communities which welcomed them. They must have come back with stories and would have been changed by their experience. Jesus told them not to rejoice. In my coming back I can't rejoice for what I feel now is a need to strengthen our relationship with the Diocese of South Dakota and to walk the journey of ministry with Mo. Margaret, Mo. Mikayla, Fr West, Fr Two Feathers, and the many deacons and lay readers who faithfully serve God in this difficult part of the world.

The Lakota people are a proud and humble people. Their spirituality is based on the circle, which means no one person has dominance. Community is important to them. Generosity is also important. Out of a family's poverty they will feed the many that come for the funerals. It is expected and they provide. They are interdependent people.

We will celebrate the independence of this great nation tomorrow and all that has flowed from it. Let us remember though that God still calls us to go into the world interdependent with the Holy Spirit and with each other, as we seek to reconcile the world to God, which is the mission of the church.

Amen