

Sermon – Proper 9 – St Luke and St Matthew Brooklyn

The 243rd Anniversary of Independence

I hope you all had a nice, relaxing national birthday celebration last Thursday, the 243rd anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. We have a lot to be thankful for in our country and a lot of work still to do to make the country truly equitable for all those that live here.

We as a country have been exerting our independence of late as we have exited a lot of multi-lateral agreements such as the Paris Climate Accord, various trade pacts and nuclear agreements. The rhetoric around these moves has largely centered on the idea that these agreements were not in our best interests.

This movement toward independence is happening overseas as well. Three years ago, Great Britain declared its desire to be independent again, freeing itself from the constraints of the European Union. For three years, they have wrestled with what independence from Europe means and its causing much friction and anxiety.

It probably shouldn't have come as a huge surprise as nationalism 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, 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 had a natural check and balance against a central authority.

President Kennedy noted that it was his task to “weave from all [the] tangled threads [of society], 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. At the time the spirit of effort required for interdependence was playing 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.

Kennedy recounted that Alexander Hamilton reminded New Yorkers to “think continentally” but he reminded the country to “think intercontinentally.” The message then was relevant and its still relevant as political 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 missionaries, but as interdependent teams.

Jesus sent them out like lambs into the midst of wolves, sort of ambassadors to prepare the way for his message of love. They went out in a most vulnerable state with no resources. They took nothing other than the gospel message and Jesus' instruction 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, 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. But Jesus reminded them not to rejoice at their miraculous acts but to rejoice out of knowledge that God is the source of all their knowledge, wisdom and insight.

God calls us to continually be engaged in the taking Jesus' message into the world. We do this in many ways however all for the same purpose, that is expanding the kingdom of God. We also do this because God has richly blessed us, not only with the promise of forgiveness and endless love, but with material resources.

St Gregory the Great declared that it is "not without deep sorrow" that we hear that the laborers are few: "Although there is no lack of people longing to hear the good news, there is a lack of people to spread it."

One of the ways we have of ensuring there are people in the field to spread the good news is to fund the work of the church, especially where it lacks funds. Those of you from The Church of the Redeemer ensured the expansion of the kingdom of God by sharing some of the proceeds from the sale of your church. A tithe fund was created from the sale proceeds and \$2.1m was distributed to Dioceses across the world including the Diocese of South Dakota, Liberia, Guinea, Bo (in Sierra Leone), Navajoland, Haiti, Torit (South Sudan), Ecuador Central, and Cape Coast in West Africa.

One such gift that is dear to my heart was \$300,000 given to the Cheyenne River Episcopal Ministry team. A few years ago, I had the privilege of going to Cheyenne River and meeting the elders and clergy working to bring the love of Jesus to some of our first nations people.

It was humbling to be able to be on the ground and listen to the stories of the Lakota elders, the youth and the priests and deacons there. I was able to appreciate the hard work being done by Margaret Watson, the lone priest for Cheyenne River Ministries. The ministry area 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 that came from Redeemer tithe gift funded a second priest for three years. This year they will 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 for the kingdom of God, 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 in the communities which welcomed them. They came back with stories and would have been changed by their experience. Seeing and experiencing people's lives changed by their new faith in God is humbling but also exciting.

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 and faithful people trying to survive in a hostile world.

Today the Stewardship and Finance Working Group starts its work in developing a program of stewardship for our parish. Our stewardship is more than our weekly pledge, although financial support for the church is important. Stewardship is a spiritual discipline, a way of living if you like, centered on thankfulness for the resources we have been given, both personally and corporately. Our giving is an act of worship. Giving of ourselves to each other and ourselves to God's people in our community.

You will hear more from the parish leadership team over the coming months as we give testimony to how we practice thankfulness for all that God has given us. For now though let your hearts be open to our interdependence as a community and all that that entails as we seek to go out into the community as laborers for God.

Amen