

Sermon preached by The Rev. Charles Rowins at St. Christopher-by-the-Sea, Gibson Island, Maryland, 6th Sunday after Pentecost, July 1, 2018.

On July 2, 1776, the Continental Congress, the governing body of the 13 colonies, approved a resolution of independence from Great Britain. Two days later, July 4, the Congress issued an explanation for this action. This explanation is what we know as the Declaration of Independence.

What is interesting about this declaration of independence is that dependence, not independence, is the cornerstone.

The heart of the Declaration is this sentence: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.

And at the heart of this sentence is the Creator who endows. Everything else flows from this Divine act. Without the endowment, and, more to the point, without the Endower, the Creator, who knows what would have happened, not only to the 13 colonies, but to life itself?

So, as we observe, as we celebrate the 4th, we need to remember that our independence as a nation, and our independence as individuals within that nation, is religious in nature. What you and I do every Sunday is to remind ourselves to keep God, the Endower, the Creator, front and center in our lives. It is healthy for us and our families and for all those whose lives we touch in a positive manner.

It is also helpful for our nation. Whatever our political differences, all of us should agree that God has given us a sacred responsibility to care for our nation in a spirit of thanksgiving. Our lessons this morning speak to this relationship of responsibility and thanksgiving.

The Wisdom of Solomon (**Wisdom of Solomon 1:13-15; 2:23-24**) is not a book by King Solomon, but a book about King Solomon. He was known for his wisdom, illustrated in the story of the two women arguing about a baby. Each claimed motherhood. Solomon threatened to cut the baby in half

One of the women said okay. The other said no, don't do that; she can have the baby. Solomon gave the baby to the woman who was willing to give up the baby in order to save the baby.

The wisdom illustrated in this morning's passage is straightforward. There are forces for Good and forces for Evil. Good is stronger than Evil, but Evil will fight hard to prevail. God will win, however. The baby is saved. Our responsibility is to be thankful both for the truth of Good over Evil and the privilege of promoting that truth.

St. Paul in his Second Letter to the Corinthians (**II Corinthians 8:7-15**) reminds us that in promoting the truth we are to exercise our gifts and talents. "For the eagerness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has – not according to what one does not have." In other words, everybody has a role, and it is a unique role.

This too is wisdom, and the more you and I can internalize this wisdom, the more effective we can be in promoting the truth of Good over Evil, and the more content we will be as creatures wanting to do the right thing. That is, we will find our place in the scheme of things.

How many times did our parents remind us of this wisdom, and how many times have we passed it on to our children? This is one of the chief responsibilities of parenthood, and, if received and followed, one of the great satisfactions of parenthood. "You have talents, my son, my daughter, and you have a role to play."

The gospel today (**Mark 5:21-43**) features a parent who speaks for his daughter and an adult woman who speaks for herself. Both seek healing, and both take the initiative.

The adult woman says, "If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well." She works her way through the crowd and touches the cloak of Jesus. "Immediately her hemorrhage stopped." Jesus says to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease."

Jesus then proceeds to the home of Jairus, where Jesus encounters “people weeping and wailing loudly.” Jesus announces that the girl “is not dead, but sleeping.” The people laugh. Jesus takes mom and dad inside, where Jesus touches the daughter and says, “Little girl, get up!” And she does. Mom and dad are amazed, but Jesus tells them not to share what has happened. But mom and dad know who was responsible.

How do these two Gospel incidents illustrate the relationship of responsibility and thanksgiving? What do they have to do with our observance of the 4th of July?

Jesus is all about healing. Think crucifixion and resurrection. Think sacrifice and victory. Think responsibility and thanksgiving. Our nation is in need of healing. There is plenty of blame to go around, but there is also plenty of opportunity. Our job and our privilege is to do what we can in thought, word and deed to “lay to heart the great dangers we are in by our unhappy divisions.” This is language from the Book of Common Prayer, and it is right on target.

We have a job to do. This is not a job forced on us, but invited by us. When we say yes to Jesus, we understand that there is hard work ahead. But it’s in that hard work that we find true joy. From the Prayer of St. Francis: “For it is in giving that we receive.”

Is there a relationship between responsibility and thanksgiving? You bet there is. One of the best feelings in the world is to know that you’ve tried your best to help, and that there has been a good outcome. When Jesus healed the woman who touched his cloak and when the daughter of Jairus got up and began to walk, I’m certain that Jesus said quietly “Thank you, Lord.” We do this too, don’t we?

And, on a grander scale, this is what the 4th of July is about. It was so for those who gathered at the Continental Congress and crafted the Declaration of Independence. And it is so for you and me, two hundred plus years later, as we seek to “lay to heart the great dangers we are in by our unhappy divisions.”

At the start of the Continental Congress, a prayer was offered. It began “Be Thou present, O God of wisdom, and direct the councils of this honorable assembly; enable them to settle things on the best and surest foundation.”

You and I are today’s council. We are members of this “honorable assembly.” We are citizens. We have a responsibility to “settle things on the best and surest foundation.” And what is this foundation? Today’s Collect tells us:

Almighty God, you have built your Church upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone. Grant us so to be joined together in the unity of spirit by their teaching, that we may be made a holy temple acceptable to you.

Perhaps the surest way for you and me to give thanks for our independence as a nation is to remind ourselves and others of our dependence on the Almighty. To that end, here is our Declaration: To you, O God, we give you thanks, and promise to do our best.” Amen.