

Sunday, July 5, 2020  
5<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

Rev. Jane McDougle

*Genesis 24:34-38, 42-49, 58-67; Psalm 45: 11-18; Romans 7:15-25a;  
Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30*

“Attending to the soul-deep call of America’s Independence Day”

*Parker J. Palmer*

This July 4<sup>th</sup> weekend is a weekend like none other.

There will be no breathtaking pyrotechnic firework displays to ooh and ahh at. No large family gatherings, filled with hugging and burnt hot-dogs. Most of us will instead be quietly at home, as we have been since mid-March.

We are making, living the history that will be written down in books to come. And as interesting as that might be, it is certainly not comfortable.

As Krista Tippett said in her ‘On Being’ podcast this week,

*It is a heavy time. Not just (here) in Minnesota, where George Floyd died under the knee of a casually brutal cop. Not just in the United States, where social, political, public health, and economic turmoil seems to engulf the nation. It is a heavy time around the world, as the pandemic continues to take a huge toll in lives lost and economies severely weakened.*

And this weekend, in the middle of all this, we have to consider how to celebrate the signing of the American Declaration of Independence.

And, as has been said many times before: what an extraordinarily brave and inspirational document it was and still is. Its tragic flaw is of course that its brave, inspirational words did not, and still do not include everybody in this country: hardly a surprise when the birth of America lies hidden away in land theft, genocide, and slavery. Not good places to start...

This year, I, and I’m sure some of you, listened to a group of many timed grandchildren of Frederick Douglass’ proclaim his July 5<sup>th</sup> speech of 1852, “What to a slave is the 4<sup>th</sup> of July?” I was deeply moved. He praises the courage of the founding forefathers, and wishes that he could rejoice and celebrate, but goes on to say:

*The rich inheritance of justice, liberty, prosperity and independence, bequeathed by your fathers, is shared by you, not by me. The sunlight that brought light and healing to you, has brought stripes and death to me.*

What gift that so many of us are hearing the words of the 1776 declaration more clearly and powerfully than perhaps we ever have before. Perhaps now, more than ever before we have an opportunity to live into the unrealized and unimagined hope inscribed, albeit unwittingly, within those lines: that we are indeed all equal, regardless of any apparent or presumed differences.

In the words of Parker J. Palmer's Facebook post this weekend:

*We dishonor the Day of Independence by pretending that all is well and blowing a triumphal horn. We honor it by attending to its living voice and responding to its soul-deep call in whatever way we can.*

Vincent Harding, a leader in the Civil Rights movement, close friend and occasional speech writer for Martin Luther King, Jr, wrote on the question, "Is America possible?"

An intriguing question. Over the many years I have lived in this country, I have often found myself trying to explain to Europeans quite how large the U.S. is, the enormity of the regional differences, the complicated histories, and the seeming impossibility of unity among such diversity.

And, yet, I do have hope, to answer Vincent Harding, that America is indeed possible.

Recently I watched a PBS documentary called 'American Creed' and was moved by the power and hope of the stories about what it means to be American from around this country. All is not lost, even if right now we feel ravaged and exhausted by fear, uncertainty, and distress.

How exquisitely timely today's Gospel passage from Matthew:

*"Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."*

The well named 'comfortable words' of the 1928 Book of Common Prayer.

Breathe them in, my friends. All is not lost. We follow Jesus who understands all too well how harassed and helpless we can feel. Who understands how blind, deaf, self-entitled, greedy and divided we can be, and yet persists in reaching out towards us in love and compassion.

Breathe these words in, and in finding their comfort, also reclaim your hope. It is exactly when we are feeling depleted, that it is paradoxically easiest for us to

entertain the possibility of alternative ways of being. Ways of being that are not so certain that we are right, and that all is of course well.

Now is the time to remind ourselves of all that is good and possible in this country. Now is the time to recognize where we have failed, and how, together, we can work together to create an inclusive, just society for all. To bring that 'rich inheritance of justice, liberty, prosperity and independence' into being for all.

In this work, there will be gifts and there will be sacrifices. We need to breathe in the spirit, the possibility, the hope, and we need to recognize the strength of the power of belonging to each other: all others, not just our own recognizable tribe.

Let us nurture a passionate sense of belonging to each other, beginning locally and reaching out to our borders and beyond. Imagine the joy and possibility of that way of being.

It is the way of the Kingdom of God, whether the world calls it that or not.

I'll end with a prayer: not the Book of Common Prayer's collect for Independence Day which conveniently disregards all those in this country not celebrating liberty, but instead, the Prayer for the Nation:

*Lord God Almighty, you have made all the peoples of the earth for your glory, to serve you in freedom and in peace: Give to the people of our country a zeal for justice and the strength of forbearance, that we may use our liberty in accordance with your gracious will; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*