

Pastor Jon's Sermon from July 5, online worship. Based on all four of the lectionary texts.

Zechariah 9:9-12, Psalm 145:8-14, Romans 7:15-25a, Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30

“A Different Independence Day in 2020?”

Each one of our lessons for today proclaim hope in God to get us through some tough predicaments. Zechariah is proclaiming to Jewish people in diaspora a hope of returning home. A new king, a humble king, riding a donkey, will come to bring peace to the nations. A messiah figure from the line of David will come set the prisoners free. Instead of looking at their predicament of everything they lost, Zechariah calls on them to be prisoners of hope in God who will restore them... even double. What does it look like to be a prisoner of hope?

In our Psalm, the psalmist is reminding people that God is establishing a kingdom on earth that is greater than any earthly kingdom. That God is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. That the Lord is good to all. And Pastor Dewey Wisner recalled in Bible Study this week that when we see the word all, it means that “all means all.” God cares for the good of all humanity. “The Lord upholds all those who fall and lifts up those who are bowed down.”

How many of you have feel like you have fallen or are bowed down? How many of you are on your knees praying and asking for God to intervene and get us through 2020?

I feel we are in a tough predicament right now as a human race and as a country. There doesn't seem to be any easy answers with Covid-19 and the renewed struggle of our black and brown brothers and sisters. Everything with the pandemic and our renewed conscience about the recent and past history of our country make my heart hurt. It is almost too much to take in right now. But the one we follow, Jesus Christ, challenges us see all humanity through his gracious and loving eyes, and to move toward justice for all.

On this Independence Day weekend, we celebrate America's freedom from Great Britain.

But on July 4, 1776, The Declaration of Independence was signed. We remember these words from the Declaration of Independence, "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." I have hope in this vision for America.

But Lincoln didn't sign the emancipation proclamation until January 1, 1863. 87 years later. Then I recently learned about Juneteenth and how descendants of black slaves view their independence. On June 19, 1865, enslaved African-Americans in Galveston, Texas, were told they were free. Two and a half years after the emancipation proclamation.

I recall life being much simpler as a kid. In the mornings before the 4th, I would hop on my bike and head down to the fireworks tent and pick up some fireworks with the money I saved. Sometimes my parents would give me a little extra. That was a good day. Then, our family would always go to my grandma's lake home on the 4th and waterski and BBQ. We did some fishing, watched some Brewers games, played cribbage, badminton, and croquet. We would light off our fireworks at dark, all legal of course. Then we would hop in the car and go watch the big fireworks display at the fairgrounds.

Now that I know more, and I see riots in our streets against police brutality toward black and brown people, and watch statues come down, Independence Day is going through a time of reckoning. In regards to statues, I feel if people want statues removed, there is a legal process to do that. A lot of good learning can happen by all sides if they allow for conversation and a legal means to taking the statues down.

What do you do with all of this? Do we put our heads in the sand and pretend it isn't there. No. We are called to learn the truth about our sinfulness as a humanity, we need to repent for the sins of previous generations, and try harder seek a better righteousness.

Speaking of sinfulness. In our second lesson, the Apostle Paul is in a struggle over his own sinfulness. Sin is our human condition, we are born into sin. Sin separates us from God and others. It is our own self-centeredness... turned inwardness. Paul, who was a wonderful theologian and missionary struggled with his own sins. No matter how hard he tried, he did the very things he hated. "For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate." Paul is a broken man, here. He is vulnerable. He is not a perfect Christian. He struggles with the evil that dwells in him. I can relate to Paul. We all can. Each day we can reflect and wonder why I did this or that. I am thankful for Paul's struggle. In the end of that text, he shares the Gospel. Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! Christ's work on the cross and in his resurrection frees us from our sins of the day. Today we hear this in the confession and absolution and receive it in communion.

Finally in our Gospel, people were rejecting Jesus and John the Baptist teachings and table fellowship. John because he lived an ascetic life and ate simply, and Jesus for eating with tax collectors and sinners. Yet Jesus was thankful for those who came to believe in him as God's Son. He calls them infants. Children, vulnerable, outsiders. They were the least in the kingdom. The elite and powerful didn't heed Jesus' message, but those who were bowed down and left out were set free by his Words and actions.

Jesus finishes by saying, "Come to me, all you that are weary and carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest." Those shackled by the laws of religion or by the powers of the Roman Empire, Jesus invites them to yoke with him. For Jesus' yoke is easy and his burden is light.

We have so many unhealthy yokes. Fear of the unknown, anxiety over how much distance to keep, trusting in human political leaders over God, the yoke of our sins. Jesus invites us to come and lay our burdens on him. He's got you. Amen.