

Lessons from the Young Church: Proper 9 A
July 3, 2011
Family of Christ Lutheran Church
Chanhassen, Minnesota
Pastor Kristie Hennig

1 Corinthians 3:1-11; Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30: Declaring Our Interdependence

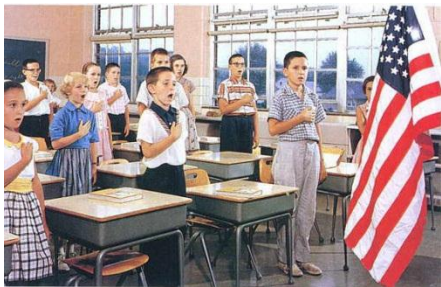
This summer, for your listening pleasure,
Pr Jerry and I are preaching a sermon series we're calling
"Young Churches Speak to Us Today."
Our texts come from the letters of Paul,
which were part of the correspondence
between the young Christian communities forming across the
Mediterranean and their founding pastor, the Apostle Paul.
The stories behind that correspondence can be found in part two of
Luke's narrative,
which we know as the book of Acts.

Even though life in the Greco-Roman world of the first century
was very different from life as we know it in these United States
more than 2,000 years later,
we have, surprisingly, a lot in common with Paul's mission starts in
Philippi, Corinth, Thessaloniki, Galatia, Ephesus, and Rome.
Like those emerging churches, Family of Christ, too, is a young church –
organized just 30 years ago
and overwhelmingly young both in terms of the age of our members and
in our outlook.
In every sense of the word,
we are a young church and we are entering an exciting, new chapter in
our history.
And just as it was with the first Christian churches,
there are a lot of voices calling to us.

A lot of voices, and a lot of choices.

Last Sunday, Pr Jerry pointed out that in the letter to the Philippians, Paul calls the church there to embrace a new identity. They are marathon runners with their eyes on the prize – namely, Jesus – and Paul urges them to hold fast to that goal.

The believers in Corinth, on the other hand, who come from different parts of the city to eat and worship together, need a different message: They need to stop quarreling and get on the same page. So Paul leads them back to their center, what they hold in common, and pleads with them to pledge their allegiance to the One who is their foundation – Jesus Christ.



When I was in elementary school, we began each day with the pledge of allegiance. (How many of you remember doing this?) We stood by our desks, facing the flag that hung over the blackboard, and with our hands over our hearts, we recited the pledge in unison. It was a daily reminder of how lucky we were to be citizens of the greatest nation on earth, the U.S. of A.

Which was *nothing like* the nasty U.S.S.R.

Promising our undivided loyalty to the red-white-and-blue was the least we could do, we thought, in exchange for all that freedom we had.

Tomorrow is Independence Day.

A day to wave at beauty queens and politicians in shiny convertibles,
clap for marching bands sweating in the mid-day sun,
ooh and ah over fireworks,
and eat a big slice of apple pie.

It's a national holiday to remember the blessings of representative government that is dedicated to liberty and justice for all.

But that's tomorrow.

Let's make *today* – the 3rd of July – *Interdependence Day*.

Baby Simon can help us with that.



Simon is Gene's and my grandson,
born just 13 days ago to our daughter Kate and her husband, Scott.
He is completely amazing to us,
and to his Auntie Em and Uncle Luke –
who flew in from D.C. to meet the little dude.
His parents are crazy about Simon, too, of course,
and together the three of them (along with Decibelle the dog)

are getting adjusted to life together.

Even after watching two siblings and my own three children
grow up,

I am astounded at the helplessness of newborns.

Simon is completely dependent, of course,
upon those around him for nourishment and safety,
for emotional and physical comfort.

He is completely dependent and completely trusting.

His parents hang on every whimper and delight in every yawn.

They are learning his little ways,
and he is starting to recognize their voices.

Soon they will be able to differentiate between his cries –
when he is hungry,
when he needs a diaper change,
when he's over-tired.

Already, he trusts them completely.

And they know he's depending on them.

There're pretty tight, these three...well, four with Deci-Dog.

It's a beautiful thing when a baby is welcomed into a family.

And when he is brought to the baptismal font,
a story of salvation and freedom that encompasses all other stories
is enacted.

Debra Dean Murphy calls baptism the Christian's *Dependence Day*.

We celebrate God's claim on the child,

and promise to rely on one another to raise him in the Family of Christ.

The baptized receives a new citizenship that transcends all others.

And because as an infant he cannot speak for himself,

God's word and a splash of water does the talking:

“Sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked by the cross of Christ... forever.”¹

To whom do *you* belong?

Christians will say – or should – “to Christ” or “to God.”

But there are other allegiances that want a piece of us:

work, possessions, status, fame,

social media, addictions, teams, and more.

The Bible calls those competing affiliations “idolatry”

when they creep into the governing center of our lives,

pushing Jesus out to the edges.²

The problem Paul was finding in the new mission start in Corinth was that the people weren’t getting along.

In fact, they were jockeying for position in the power structure.

There were several distinct disputed matters

and they shared a common theme:

disregard for those who were different.

This childish behavior led to distrust and disunity,

and a laser-focus on what separated them instead of what had drawn them together from diverse parts of the city of Corinth in the first place.

In the course of extensive correspondence –

the Corinthians wrote him once and Paul wrote them at least 4 times –

Paul leads them back to their center,

what they have in common: Jesus Christ.

And it is Christ – enfleshed, crucified, risen, and ascended –

who brings a radical new perspective.

The Corinthians’ default position is competition, rivalry, and in-fighting;

Jesus urges cooperation and collaboration instead –

¹ <http://debradeanmurphy.wordpress.com/2010/07/03/flag-vs-font-pledging-our-allegiance/>

² J. Paul Sampley, *New Interpreter’s Bible*, vol. X, 809.

not self-sufficiency, not *independence*, but *interdependence*.
Unity is elevated to a desired goal.

We might wish an epiphany of this kind
for our state and national officials on both sides of the partisan divide,
whose heels seem to be pretty well dug in.
And we might wish for our own epiphany
about what is at the governing center of our shared life,
what it means to be...
“one nation under God with liberty and justice for all.”

Our gospel reading for today gives us a picture of that center:
It’s Jesus, his arms outstretched, calling to us, speaking promises...

“Come to me, all you who 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.”

Jesus knows the burdens we carry – the disappointment, the cynicism,
the frustration, the fears, the selfishness...
the temptation to quarrel among ourselves, to jockey for position...
And he says, “Let me help you carry your troubles.
Tell me what feels heavy, what doesn’t work,
and I will shoulder the weight with you.”

Today, on this Day of *Interdependence*,
may we feel Jesus’ tug on us

as we are drawn together towards the radiant center that unites – as
Christians, as neighbors, as citizens of the world.

Amen.