

Sermon
St. Andrew's Church
5 Pentecost—Proper 9-A
July 5, 2020
William Bradbury

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

Yesterday we celebrated the birth of our nation. These celebrations help us to do two important things:

First, they help remind us our nation was born only through the great sacrifice of others.

Friday night we watched the Broadway musical "Hamilton", on Disney Plus—what a powerful retelling of the men and women who "ventured all for the liberties we now enjoy."

Second, as we celebrate our birth we take stock of how we are doing in fulfilling our founding vision: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all... 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.**"

At the beginning that grand vision only applied to White men who own property. No woman could vote and 4 million slaves didn't even own the right to raise their children.

In his famous speech in July 5, 1852 former slave Frederick Douglass gives an impassioned oration reminding us that there is much to celebrate in the vision, courage, and sacrifice of the founding fathers.

But then he famously says, "What, to the American slave, is your 4th of July? I answer; a day that reveals to him...your celebration is a sham; your boasted liberty, an unholy license; your national greatness, swelling vanity; your sounds of rejoicing are empty and heartless; your denunciations of tyrants, brass fronted impudence; your shouts of liberty and equality, hollow mockery; your prayers and hymns, your sermons and thanksgivings, with all your religious parade, and solemnity, are, to [the slave], mere bombast, fraud, deception, impiety, and hypocrisy—a **thin veil to cover up crimes which would disgrace a nation of savages.** There is not a nation on the earth guilty of practices, more shocking and bloody, than are the people of these United States, at this very hour."

401 years after the first slaves arrived to help build our nation, we entered a profound moment of reckoning when the veil hiding white supremacy and systemic racism was lifted in the 8 minute, 46 second video of the murder of a Black man under the knee of a white man, for it made visible for all to

see the entrenched system that does not believe that people who look like George Floyd deserve "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."

I see hope in this moment and in the Black Lives Matter movement. I pray with you that the Church of Jesus Christ continues to break out of its shell of complacency and complicity and make common cause with the oppressed of our land to work for "a more perfect union" where there is "liberty and justice **for all**".

But I am also discouraged. At our birthing Benjamin Franklin said to his fellow rebels, "We Must All Hang Together, or Most Assuredly, We Will All Hang **Separately**". **He knew that securing our** freedom from a powerful empire would only be achieved **if we could hang together, not just in 1776, but also in 2020.**

And it is this "hanging together" that worries me.

My parents' generation hung together in the face of economic depression and warring empires.

Today, however, many think freedom has nothing to do with hanging together for the common good. Rather, freedom means the ability to do whatever I feel like doing.

For example, a person should be free to drink a quart of whiskey every night if they so choose. But we know that person isn't free to choose but is in bondage to a chemical. It is an addiction that robs a person of their freedom and much else.

Those under this addiction sometimes even choose the added freedom **to drive around in their car while drunk.**

As Lincoln reminds us, "Freedom is not the right to do what we want, but what we ought."

But that's the problem because so often our will is bound up with selfish and destructive habits, we simply aren't free to do what we ought, to choose the good and the beautiful.

Many of us don't want to be prejudiced, but we simply don't see the system of racism.

We claim to play fair, but simply don't see that the white team has 10 players in the field on defense and when we come up to bat the bases are already loaded.

Paul writes in Romans today: "For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me..."

Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?

Jesus calls us to true freedom when he cries out: "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 Welsh poet David Whyte, I think it was, said we start-out life with a tiny bag into which we put things that trouble us—we put in our sins and the sins of others against us. All our slights, resentments, and problems go into the bag, so by the time we are 40 we are dragging this enormous black bag 100 feet behind us.

When we are yoked to Jesus, we are finally free to drop the bag and can begin see clearly and walk freely for we are also yoked to God and all those God loves.

Richard Rohr, mystic and Franciscan priest, says, **"We don't see things as they are. We see things as we are."**

When I am living only for myself, I see others as a threat to my happiness. **When we are yoked to Christ, we see others as our sisters and brothers in Christ.**

"We Must All Hang Together, or Most Assuredly, We Will All Hang Separately".

I was shopping at Market Basket in Chelmsford the other day: everyone had on a mask, kept their distance, and followed the direction arrows on the floor.

Some see this as a bunch of brainwashed sheep who have allowed the state to muzzle them.

For me it was a beautiful experience of community. My fellow shoppers and I were **patriots hanging together to defeat a dangerous enemy that threatens us all.**

On February 22, 1861, on the way to his inauguration, Abraham Lincoln stops at Independence Hall in Philadelphia and reflects on the vision in the Declaration of Independence that had been signed in that hall.

He says, "Now, my friends, can this country be saved upon that basis? If it can, I will consider myself one of the happiest men in the world, if I can help to save it. If it cannot be saved upon that principle, it will be truly awful. **But if this country cannot be saved without giving up that principle, I... would rather be assassinated on this spot than surrender it."**

This is what it looks like to be yoked to Christ.