

Sermon for 4 July 2012 @ Bethesda UMC/Baltimore

Sixth Sunday after Pentecost/Independence Day Sunday

Scriptures: 2 Samuel 5:1-5, 9-10; Psalm 48 (UM782); 2 Corinthians 12:2-10; Mark 6 :1-13

“Three C’s”

On this day, when it really is “First Sunday,” as we old-time Methodists call Communion Sunday, we pause to thank God for allowing those of us who feel comfortable and safe enough to gather within this cherished building, as well as grateful for the technology that has made it possible to keep going week after week and month after month in pretty much our accustomed way through this awesome worldwide epidemic. The memories, the scenery, the sound and feel of here is dear, and even though we know God is everywhere, and we never meet without the spirit of Presence Jesus demonstrated in today’s Gospel lesson, when he picked up from the rejection of his home village of Nazareth and went right on, sending his disciples out two-by-two into ministry beyond any familiar setting ... still, this is precious, this is treasured space, and we thank God for it...

I don’t know when I’ve been so fortunate as a preacher, to have a quotation on the outside signboard that tells me so concisely what I should be saying, on this national celebration Sunday. Did you read it as you came in ... or did those of you calling in get wind of what Vivian chose for this past week? Listen: “Freedom is not the right to do as we please, but the opportunity to do what is right.” Isn’t that on-point for Independence Day Sunday, when the Founding Fathers proclaimed an annual commemoration day of this grand experiment called “The United States of America?” It’s got shades of Ben Franklin’s sharp answer to the lady who asked “what sort of government you gentlemen have provided for us?” Bill Wood knows what Benjamin Franklin tartly answered the woman: “A Republic ... if you can keep it!” Doesn’t that sound like Vivian as well as Ben? We know we are dependent on each other to keep it going. We know it does not run itself. We even know, this year, how close we run to failure, not just always, but specifically on January 6, 2021, when our national space was invaded by troubled and anxious citizens who were not keeping a republic in either body or spirit.

Dear God, what troubles we have seen! What exposure we have shared, not only from infection and isolation, but from the very essence of cooperation which makes a republic vital, and whose absence dooms everything we hold dear about community in freedom and prosperity in solid effort and good manners and self-respect on which the whole thing is founded!

I had a title for my sermon before this better one came alive last Monday on our outdoor sign. Let me give it to you: “Three C’s.” It seemed to me that this Sunday, in this year, we were not just celebrating, not even commemorating, not even simply enjoying a great national holiday. This year, **Cooperation** is our great calling and need. We’ve always been able to cooperate part of the time, part of the way ... but never have we had so much of its opposite ... I’m talking about **Conflict**. We have much to learn about choosing the greater good and working to achieve it on every level. We have done great things through **Competition**, and in fact make that into our national rallying cry a great deal of the time. We know the value of **competition**, in athletics, in business, in learning, in exploring everything from technology to

government, from business to the arts ... but isn't it about time we honored more our Creator's gift of **cooperation**? Aren't there ways of ... there's no other word for it, if we take the point of our religion deeply to heart ... there's no other word for loving better than **cooperation**, for the America we know. This year we have been traumatized at the **conflict** that crops up whenever we get together, the rage that bubbles beneath the surface of everything we see in our common life. So I put it to us: Doing what is right, as Vivian challenges us, is far more than toeing the line or even abiding by the Ten Commandments, although they provide a great set of goals and boundaries for our common life as well as our individualism. Responding to the love at the center of things is more than that, and we haven't learned it well enough to make a great nation out of ourselves. The gift of our present moment is more gentle, more deep, more harmonious than America has ever learned to demonstrate. This year, God help us, we have seen the other side of ourselves starkly indeed ... but I am totally convinced that seeing "through a mirror darkly" is not the good news to which we are invited, and called, and are capable of. These things we know, and now talk about, that we spent so much energy denying, are invitations more than condemnations. Color, and gender; background, and experience, are not limitations in the good light of either the Hebrew Bible or the Christian testament. Neither are they the fullness of Buddhism, or Islam, or any of the other great spiritual traditions. And let us be clear: We are spirit as well as mind and body There is no completeness to our experience, our capacity for wholeness, that ignores the Spirit in us and all creation. We are on the brink of great beauty together, immense expansion of our joy and community achievement. This is good news ... this is the essence of this day ... and we know it through Jesus Christ, in whose name we say, Amen.