

Sermon for 7 July 2024 @ Bethesda UMC/Baltimore

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost/Independence Day Sunday

Scriptures: 2 Samuel 5:1-5, 9-10; Psalter: p. 782 (Psalm 48); 2 Corinthians 12:2-10; Mark 6:1-13

Sermon

Did it ever strike you that there's nobody that knows how to fight each other like Jews and Arabs?

I know that's crude and unfair; but in this age, when every argument and battle gets immediately known world-wide, and when we try to look at everything from a scientific point of view, toting up everything on one side and then the other as though there was a beginning, and one side started it and then the other couldn't forgive, it does get rather Biblical.

We're told again and again that the people of Israel are God's latest hope to start over after the Flood, and even though the New Testament presents Jesus as God's victory at loving everywhere at last ... Jesus can get pretty angry in each of the Gospels; and the present moment comes as close as I've ever envisioned to an unhappy ending.

It's worrisome on this Independence Day Sunday. I grew up loving this country. We sang all the great patriotic songs; and we've lots of evidence of human hope and progress in our time, and in this place, with these beloved friends and customs.

Our first reading, from Second Samuel, asks us to celebrate a good time with a good king, David; and Psalm 148 supports our joy in the power of good government that we know about, many moments in history, and some in our own national story.

In his second Letter to the church at Corinth, Paul struggles with competitive personalities in the early church, and even describes some visions and elevations God has allowed him after his conversion ... but he insists these aren't the point. Instead, what matters, the only reality, is God's success at loving ... God's grace, greater than all our human failings. Put your faith in that, and you'll be well.

And there we are at Jesus, summing it up as always, with two examples, as Mark so often does. In one, he shakes his head at people's lack of amazement at the healings and wisdom he's brought back from his time with his cousin John and his time alone in the wilderness with the Spirit of God. In the other example, Jesus wastes no time, but moves straight ahead choosing disciples and sending them forth to duplicate what he has learned and brought home, creating a fellowship we now know, and follow him in.

The message is plain and simple, this Independence Day Sunday, for us Americans. Those of us who, by God's grace, find ourselves Christian, have so much power! Not to be like his homefolks; but instead, through Jesus, power to expand our moment and place in history...and

the tragedy is how little we have realized of our moment's true greatness. That's one side of this high moment, as people of faith.

The other side is equally grand: Jesus is among us. This is God in the flesh, within us. This is the reality we are here to announce, and to lift high for all to see. So much can be done! Through our union, our uniqueness, God is aching to achieve!

Really there is no time for anything but thanks and staying the course as it's been shown us and given us to continue on.

You know this. I feel it. It's our privilege to pray about it now, so let us do so.

Heal us, Emmanuel. Show us the way. Bring us at last into the moment this day that we have come to celebrate. Through kindness, courage, and hopefulness that will bear fresh fruit for all around us, and all who will follow.

In Christ's name we say,

Amen.