Proper 9 All Saints’ Church

July 7, 2019 Year C

Isaiah 66:10-14 Galatians 6: [1—6], 7-16

Psalm 66:1-8 Luke 10:1-11, 16-20

We thank you God; you hold our souls in life and will not allow our feet to slip. Amen

On July 3rd, 1776, George Washington wrote the following letter to his wife:

In a few days, you will see a Declaration setting forth the causes which have impelled us to the mighty revolution and the reasons that will justify it in the sight of God. I am fully aware of the toil and blood and treasure of what it will cost to maintain this Declaration and support and defend these states; yes, through all the gloom, I can see the rays of ravishing light and glory.

I wonder what his wife thought…. She must have been frightened. Her husband was committing treason- a crime punished by hanging.

56 men signed the Declaration of Independence.

5 were captured by the British and tortured.

12 had their homes ransacked and burned.

2 lost their sons to war.

9 fought and died.

1 had a son captured; he would have been released had the father recanted; he did not recant.

It’s an amazing story, especially when we enter into it, by imagining what it must have been like ***not*** knowing the ending.

It’s a young story too; 243 years only and can be traced through 4 men:

When Thomas Jefferson died, Abraham Lincoln was 17.

When Lincoln was assassinated, Woodrow Wilson was 8.

When Wilson died, Ronald Reagan was 12.

It’s a young story, and yet it is also archetypal…… which is why, I think, it sends shivers down your spine.

Those 56 signers risked everything. And even though risking everything to live in freedom is actually more difficult than living in slavery, these 56 signers ***knew*** they were right. They had found meaning in their pursuit of forming a nation grounded in humanity’s inalienable rights, inspired by the knowledge of God’s grace. There was no turning back.

We now know that they were far from perfect in including everyone fully in this grace, yet they at least knew the right direction.

It’s one of the best human stories we have: those risking their lives to give life and dignity for others. That’s why the story of the Declaration of Independence is archetypal. It rises above the particular to speak to the universal quest for life and living, meaning, purpose and risking.

It’s the Christ story as well. In our gospel reading this morning, Jesus is risking everything and teaching his disciples how to risk as well.

Jesus has turned his face toward Jerusalem, which means he can no longer stay in the countryside as a sage, mentor, and teacher, safe in his obscurity. He knows he must move into the political and religious center of Jerusalem and risk everything. Like the signers of the Declaration, Jesus sees so much suffering.

His people are suffering under foreign rule. His people are suffering under a stifling religious authority that is collaborating with the occupiers. But mostly, Jesus’ people are suffering under a fear of being excluded; of being deemed unworthy, of being left behind, of being labeled insignificant, even invisible.

Heaven forbid if you got sick, or couldn’t make a living, or were widowed, or were a sojourner running for your life….. you were shunned and turned out from belonging. This act of exclusion was JUSTIFIED as God’s indictment against you… because of your past sins, or sins of your father, or just being in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Jesus sees this suffering. He does not take up arms and fight against it, like all desire him to do. Rather he TRANSFORMS it by choosing to participate in it; by becoming one of the excluded!

Like the signers of our Declaration, he could not do otherwise; he risked his life so that we could live in freedom.

He loved us, until the very end.

And his cause? Not to free us from foreign rule, or to fight against political powers, but to free us from the meaninglessness of being excluded from God’s grace and love.

This is what makes his vulnerability redemptive and makes all our suffering meaningful…. Because in Jesus’ resurrection, we see that God will never abandon us. Never. And that we matter, everyone single one of us. Dignity is an inalienable right.

By trusting in God’s vision of dignity for all, we enter into God’s presence. When we participate in God’s energy- we are closer to the essence of God. We are living, then, out of our own divine presence…… because our souls, as Augustine reminds us, “do not rest until they rest with Thee, dear Lord.”

To rest with God, we need to live in freedom which is much more difficult than living in slavery, because we have to risk, come out hiding, out of safety and privilege, and be sent out like “lambs into the midst of wolves” declaring that “the Kingdom of God has come near to you.”

There is no doubt. By risking, we will suffer. This is Paul’s theme in his letter to the Galatians. He’s writing about it in LARGE LETTERS by his own hand- freedom and suffering go hand in hand.

Christ has set us free, and it’s not just about what we are free from, but what we are free for. Freedom from a life of meaninglessness is at the same time freedom for service…. To serve this goal is to know that ***everyone*** is under the banner of God’s grace of inalienable rights.

Jesus is educating his disciples, by sending them out two by two, and in extension, Jesus is sending us out as well, two by two. We, too, are not to be bound up in our own safety, walled off from preaching God’s saving Grace.

This week, Sandi and I watched a 4th of July webcast, featuring The Right Rev. Michael Hunn, Bishop of the Episcopal Church in the Diocese of the Rio Grande reaching out to the national church about detention centers housing children. What I loved about this webcast is that it was informative and not politicized. I was particularly interested, knowing that our folks on their mission trip to Juarez were just returning.

Bishop Hunn’s diocese includes the city of El Paso Texas, the Big Bend region and the entire state of New Mexico. This diocese holds 40 percent of the border between the United States and Mexico. Border Patrol agents and their families are members of congregations. The Episcopal Church there is about half Republican and half Democrat. And every Sunday, they pray the same prayers to the same God, and then get to work together in spite of differences, to make the world more like the one God envisions.

Bishop Hunn was pleading for us not to listen to our current politicians, but rather to join with them in with their diocesan work, two by two to preach that the Kingdom of God is at hand. “Before the finger pointing and blaming begins,” he says, “this is not a partisan issue. This is not a political issue. This is a moral issue. We believe in border security, but we also believe that we are called to care for all, especially the least of these. And that there is a difference between criminals and those seeking asylum.”

He is reaching out, asking us to be informed and not to protect ourselves by saying we don’t want to be political. We can be transformed by choosing to participate in suffering, by being with those in need, to know their story, and to support their dignity.

Bishop Hunn is working with the Anglican Bishop of Northern Mexico to see if we can bring relief to asylum seekers and their children and change new policies brought on by the American and Mexican government. Those policies are keeping those seeking asylum in Juarez, without shelter, food and protection. Protection that they would have received in the US if we followed earlier polices.

These new policies, of course, are putting pressure on Centro Victoria, the home that Pastor Joel has created for abandoned children. All Juarez needs is more homelessness, and vulnerable people susceptible to the drug cartels. This crisis has become personal. We care about what happens in Juarez, because we have been involved in Juarez for over 12 years.

In the spirit of the 4th of July, I will be sending out links through Saints Alive, for those who would like to be informed about our Christian stance at the borders. It’s moving and stands as a 4th of July challenge to all the bickering and political in-fighting.

When we stand for dignity for all, we are always on the side of Christ, and always on the side of what inspired our nation’s beginnings.

AMEN