

**6 Pentecost
July 4, 2021**

**In the name of the God of all creation,
The God alive in each of us as God was alive in Jesus,
And the power of God known in the Spirit.
Amen.**

Happy Independence Day! We will see fireworks again. We can gather in a crowd ...OR NOT!
We can have hot dogs and beer ...OR NOT! Happy Independence Day!

Declaring our independence after 16 months of the COVID pandemic. Declaring our independence after a bitter presidential election. Declaring our independence while our nation is starkly divided over too many issues that effect all of us. Happy Independence Day!

Independence Day on a Sunday. So, do I preach about the values of the country as espoused in the Declaration of Independence and where it intersects with our faith? Or, do I preach about the values espoused in the Declaration of Independence and the reality of the values that our nation is currently living by? Or, do I preach on the lessons from Holy Scripture that we just heard read?

I have much to say about the Declaration of Independence and its values, but I will save those thoughts for another time. So, here is me reflection on David being made King of Israel, Paul writing to the Christians in Corinth, and Jesus returning to his hometown.

In our first reading we heard more of the saga of David ... this part of the story is David being anointed king over all of Israel. The story of David shows how God looks at things differently than we do. David was the last and the least of Jesse's seven sons. The first six sons had all the marks of regal authority, but God told Samuel: "The Lord does not look at the things that man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart." David might have looked "ruddy," but God directed Samuel: "Rise and anoint him; he is the one." And so the least likely political successor was anointed king of Israel, and grew into its greatest leader ever.

Do you get the point? Sometimes God uses different criteria ... a different set of values ... than do we humans. The apostle Paul seemed to grasp at least a taste of this. In today's reading from Paul's second letter to the Christians in Corinth he wrote, speaking of his faith, "whenever I am weak, then I am strong." The Corinthians spurned the apostle Paul. They complained that Paul was a hypocrite ... bold in his letters but underwhelming in person. In contrast to his "weighty and forceful" letters, they mocked his physical presence as "unimpressive." His speaking, they said, "amounts to nothing." Invoking biting irony, Paul apologized for preaching free of charge, and admitted that he was not a "trained speaker." He turned the tables on the Corinthians with the paradox of a gospel of divine strength in human weakness.

Then, in this week's Gospel reading, Jesus returns to his hometown of Nazareth after a wildly successful ministry debut. In the weeks preceding his return, he has developed a widespread reputation for his wisdom and authority. He has proclaimed God's kingdom with challenging parables. He has called twelve disciples and earned their trust. He has cast out demons ... he has brought healing to the sick ... he calmed a storm ... and raised a little daughter from the dead. He is the hometown boy who left his family and returns with credentials ... the hometown boy made good.

Well, not so fast, said some in the crowd. In the reading, Jesus entered the synagogue of his boyhood, and began to teach. At first, things went very well ... Jesus was received with astonishment and curiosity ... "Where did this man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been given to him? What deeds of power are being done by his hands!"

Then something happens. Someone in the crowd ... we know not who, but my imagination says it could have been the busybody of Nazareth ... or a childhood rival of Jesus ... or the notorious village gossip who loves stirring up dissension ... anyhow, someone in the crowd pulled out an old story about Jesus and his family and started circulating it around the synagogue.

"Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? Are not his sisters here among us?" And they took offense at him.

In other words, "Who does this smart-aleck kid think he is?"

It turns out that the term "son of Mary" puts an interesting slant to the story. New Testament scholars tell us that in the time of Jesus the only reason to identify someone by his mother was to question their parental legitimacy. So, "Is not this the ... son of Mary?" highlights the fact that no one knew for certain who Jesus' father was. In other words, to refer to Jesus as "the son of Mary" ... and not, "the son of Joseph" ... was a calculated act, a weaponized use of Jesus' story of origin to shame him into silence. Since the Gospel of Mark has no story of Jesus being born ... those stories come later in Matthew and Luke ... this is an interesting clue to where those birth narratives came from ... an effort to explain Jesus's legitimacy.

Anyhow, in this case it was not considered possible for someone like Jesus ... a mere carpenter of questionable parentage ... to amount to anything. In other words, he had no business rising above his somewhat questionable beginnings. He has no cultural permission to outgrow his origin story. It is as if the townspeople are saying, "Remember smartass, we know exactly where you come from! Who do you think you are?!? Don't get too big for your britches! Remember, we know the real story!"

I imagine that most of us know something about Jesus' experience ... or maybe the experience of his family. Many of us have had children leave home for college ... and they come back with so much knowledge they don't know what to do with it. Your daughter who couldn't balance a check book turns into an economy major and she begins telling you what investments to make. Your son is studying physical therapy and while home at Christmas starts criticizing your exercise

regimen. Your niece who got a job with an architectural firm tells you that the color scheme in your house is all wrong.

Under these circumstances, most of us just roll our eyes. Oh, well, we think, they'll grow up and learn ... at least that is what we hope.

However, sometimes these kids are right ... but we dismiss them too quickly as naive. I can remember my oldest son, Trace, coming home from college one weekend and saying he was dating a graduate student studying marine biology. My response was, "Oh, sure. That means my son sat on a bar stool next to this grad student for five minutes." Well, he ... and the grad student in marine biology ... Terry ... proved me wrong ... they've now been married for over 30 years.

When Jesus returned to his hometown, his family thought he was mad. They tried to take custody of him. "He's lost his senses," they said. The people of Nazareth ... his friends and neighbors and those he had grown up around ... said he was insane and demon-possessed. Later in the gospels stories the religious experts said he was a glutton and drunkard who partied with sinners.

The story this morning tells us that those who knew Jesus best "took offense at him" ... literally, "they were scandalized" ... "they were embarrassed." But, for his part, Jesus was "amazed at their unbelief."

The truly sad and astonishing thing about this story is that the townspeople's suspicion and resentment diminished Jesus's ability to work good on their behalf. "He could do no deed of power there," the author of Mark writes. In some mysterious and disturbing way, the people's small-mindedness ... their lack of trust ... and their inability to embrace a new facet of Jesus's life and mission ... kept them in spiritual poverty. They were unable to welcome the unfamiliar within the familiar. They were uninterested in glimpsing the extraordinary within the ordinary. They couldn't imagine a newer story when the old one was so juicy. So they missed the presence of God in their midst. They were seeing with human eyes ... and human values. God sees with different eyes ... different values.

Whatever the people of Jesus' hometown saw in Jesus ... this craziness that had to be controlled ... was not the same thing that God saw in Jesus. God's way of seeing is different from the ways that humans see. For me that is the point of the story.

Jesus, David, and Paul all embodied the stark contrasts between the sacred folly of God's kingdom and the secular wisdom of worldly ways.

The uncomfortable fact is that Jesus offends his beloved hometown community in this story. Maybe, if the Jesus we know as the embodiment of God never offends us, then maybe it is not really Jesus ... at least the Jesus that God sees. When has Jesus ever made you angry by

stepping out of the box you've placed him in? When was the last time that you let Jesus show you an uncomfortable truth by looking at it the way God would look at it?

One of my favorite poets is Wendell Berry. He has a wonderful way of seeing things differently. He describes these two very different ways to look at life in his ***Manifesto: The Mad Farmer Liberation Front***. You have heard me read parts of this poem before, but it is one that I read to myself often and I think it is well worth repeating. It even speaks of a different way to be a true patriot on this Fourth of July. It begins with a description of the way of the world, and moves to the way of the sacred and divine.

Love the quick profit, the annual raise,
vacation with pay. Want more
of everything ready-made. ...

When they want you to buy something they will call you.
When they want you to die for profit
they will let you know.

So, friends, every day do something that won't compute.
Love the Lord. Love the world. Work for nothing.
Take all that you have and be poor.
Love someone who does not deserve it.

Denounce the government and embrace the flag.
Hope to live in that free republic for which it stands. ...

As soon as the generals and the politicians
can predict the motions of your mind, lose it.
Leave it as a sign to mark the false trail,
the way you didn't go.

Be like the fox who makes more tracks than necessary,
some in the wrong direction.

Practice resurrection. Practice resurrection.

Jesus, David, and Paul all embodied the stark contrasts between the sacred folly of God's kingdom and the secular wisdom of worldly ways ... the way God sees us and the world, and the way we humans see each other and this world around us. Sometimes, even we are invited to look at the world ... and the many others who are fellow occupants ... through a different lens ... a lens that God might choose to use. We are invited to use the criteria of God ... the values God values ... rather than that of humans. If we are to take seriously what Jesus took seriously, then it can become a practice.

Live life looking through a divine lens and you will see the world differently.

Amen.