

I.N.I.

No ... It's Independence Day

Homily for the Seventh Sunday after Pentecost-C, 3. July, A.D. 2016

St. Paul's Lutheran Church, 2958-59th St., Sacramento, CA

Isaiah 66:10-14 10

Rejoice with Jerusalem, and be glad for her,

all you who love her;
rejoice with her in joy,
all you who mourn over her—

11

that you may nurse and be satisfied
from her consoling breast;
that you may drink deeply with delight
from her glorious bosom.

12

For thus says the LORD:
I will extend prosperity to her like a
river,
and the wealth of the nations like an
overflowing stream;

and you shall nurse and be carried on
her arm,
and dandled on her knees.

13

As a mother comforts her child,
so I will comfort you;
you shall be comforted in Jerusalem.

14

You shall see, and your heart shall
rejoice;
your bodies[a] shall flourish like the
grass;
and it shall be known that the hand of
the Lord is with his servants,
and his indignation is against his
enemies. (NRSV)

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord, Jesus Christ. [Rom. 1:7]

If you read the title of my sermon today in your Service Folder, you saw the
ellipsis--you know, those three little dots which mean something is left out.
What do you guess is left out? I wanted to title it this way:

No...not **The Fourth of July**--not just **The Fourth**...It's **Independence Day**.

Maybe it's just a pet peeve of mine, but it could be more important than we realize
that the beautiful, four syllable word **Independence** is more and more avoided
for the simple one syllable "Fourth."

Independence Day! What do we lose if we don't say those words out loud,
especially to our children and grandchildren?

My good old Merriam-Webster dictionary from prep school days defines
independence: "Freedom from control by others; self-government. Syn. See freedom."

So I looked up **freedom** and there was the synonym "**liberty**."

Such good words for this week-end! **Independence! Freedom! Liberty!**

But wait, declaring independence must mean that we **were** under tyranny, so--

Part One, What Life Without Freedom Is Like

Point 1, The Bondage of Tyranny in Ancient Israel.

First let's agree that there are different kinds of tyranny.

Start with God's ancient people Israel.

In our text today, Kings Saul, David & Solomon have come and gone.

Solomon's kingdom is divided in two--northern & southern, and it's about 700 BC.

Isaiah is the prophet, and we read from his very last chapter today:

**10 Rejoice with Jerusalem, and be glad for her, all you who love her;
rejoice with her in joy, all you who mourn over her—** (Ch. 66)

Both rejoicing and mourning here, why?

David Limbaugh in his 2015 book, **The Emmaus Code: Finding Jesus in the O.T.**, lists Isai-
ah's three central messages to Israel & Judah--northern & southern kingdoms:

- 1. You've broken God's covenant thru disobedience, idolatry, and social injustice;
- 2. You've been called to repent but you've refused, so judgement will come--captivity!
- 3. There is hope after exile for future restoration of God's chosen, but only for a remnant.

So, now in Isaiah's last chapter, rejoicing was heard in Jerusalem, but mourning
over the many who died in captivity under the tyranny of Assyria & Babylon.

Point 2, The 13 American Colonies Under Tyranny.

In the 1700's here in America, the picture was a bit different, but the colonists lived under the **dictatorship** of the English king, George III.

In 1776, the **Declaration of Independence** stated:

"The history of the present King of Great Britain is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having in direct object the establishment of an absolute Tyranny over these States.... We therefore ... do ... solemnly publish and declare, That these United Colonies are, and of Right ought to be Free and Independent States...."

Of course what followed was our war for independence, and the colonists won under the generalship of George Washington, our very first president.

Point 3, Our Burdens in Today's Fifty States.

Captivity in Isaiah's time--tyranny in the time of the American experiment--do we see any comparisons to **today's political scene** as we celebrate another Independence Day?

America's second president, John Adams, said, **"Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other."**

Are we still a moral and religious people?

America's third president, Thomas Jefferson, said, **"The natural progress of things is for liberty to yield, and government to gain ground."**

Would any of us deny that our gov't has gained ground? Burdened us? E.g.:

- Citing "fairness," wealth is redistributed from those who earned it to those who did not.
- Citing "the environment," gov't regulates everything from our light bulbs to the size of our toilet tanks.
- Under "compassion," a job-killing health care program is enacted by one political party.
- In the name of "justice," oppressive taxes are levied on job providers--driving jobs and many billions of dollars overseas. [Dr. Frank Wright, D. James Kennedy Ministries, 2016]

But even as it's gaining power over **us**, Gov't seems helpless against **terrorists**.

The attack in Orlando, FL is labelled a "tragedy," not an act of 'jihad' by Omar M.

However, in the periodical FIRST THINGS, R.R.Reno the editor states, "ORLANDO WAS NOT A TRAGEDY."

"...when we apply "tragedy" to mass murder, our sense of the word is ... seen as downplaying mass murder.... [L]eadership must these days ... use the grandest word for "suffering" they can think of. It happens to be "tragedy." They intend to signal that they are empathetic. "Tragedy" is what we say when we wish to emote and say nothing."

Gov't **IS** helpless if it won't even name the enemy!

Point 4, Is There Tyranny in California today?

Well, the governor just signed another set of bills, before flying off to his European vacation, that further limit gun ownership **for law-abiding citizens**.

It's like we're second class citizens now, says the National Rifle Assn.

"Where [gov't] holds out the meaningless notion of getting guns off the street, the NRA has been saying, 'Get the criminals off the streets.' The simple truth is: sending violent criminals to prison is a surefire deterrent..." [Am. Hunter, 7'16, p.12]

John Lott writes of "The Cruelty of Gun-Free Zones" that, "Even law enforcement recognizes that gun-free zones leave shooting victims defenseless." [NAGR'16]

If these examples describe our times, and I think they do, then we--unlike Jerusalem-- have little to rejoice over.

We don't have to look far to see anger & exhaustion, as well as fear and tyranny.

However, could we, the US, be under judgement like the people in Isaiah's day?

Have we **"broken God's covenant thru disobedience, idolatry, and social injustice?"**

Have we **"been called to repent but have refused, so judgement will come--captivity!?"**

For us **"is there hope ... for future restoration of God's chosen, at least a remnant?"**

Or, because we did not do our Christian duty to work for good gov't, and we **'lived the good life'** instead, are we doomed? The good news is in:

Part 2, Where We Hear Comforting Promises.

First, Listen to Isaiah the Prophet:

12 For thus says the LORD: I will extend prosperity to [Jerusalem] like a river, and the wealth of the nations like an overflowing stream; and you shall nurse and be carried on her arm, and dandled on her knees.

This is not just any OT god making the promises here.

In most bibles the word **LORD** is all in capital letters, which translates JHWH and means the **God of the Covenant**, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob--the God who promised, through Isaiah, [ch.7] that in the fullness of time a virgin would conceive and bear a son whose name would be **Immanuel, God With Us.**

And as promised, so it came to pass--our Lord Jesus was born to the Virgin Mary in Bethlehem of Judea.

This God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, is promising prosperity.

Secondly, So Trust the Promises

It is He, our risen Savior, who makes good on the promises--He comforts us today.

13 As a mother comforts her child, so I will comfort you; you shall be comforted in Jerusalem.

"In Jerusalem"--it is there that the annual Day of Atonement was observed, a day signifying the forgiveness of sins.

It was there that the sin offerings were regularly offered in the temple.

Today we are in our Jerusalem, the church, and this day we may accept the comfort of forgiveness as we come to the Sacrament of the Altar.

Our Lord's body broken and His blood outpoured in the Sacrament means that He **did** die for us on the cross outside the gates of that same city, Jerusalem.

His rising from the grave means that the Father accepted **his sacrifice for us.**

Trust the promise, receive forgiveness today--many generations before us believed the good news, and they were comforted as a mother comforts her child.

Last point, It's Independence Day, Not "the 4th"!

Recall last Sunday's lesson from St. Paul's letter to the Galatians--it began:

"1 For freedom Christ has set us free. (Ch.5)

Paul is repeating himself--twice in seven words we hear the word 'free'.

'Freedom' here is written in the dative case, "the dative of advantage," says the latest Greek lexicon of the New Testament, **BDAG, 2000.**

We have been set free, set free for an advantage--we have an advantage over others who still languish under tyranny, we have been set free from domination **that we might live in liberty and independence.**

Thus **independence** is a gift of God which, after 18 centuries of the church proclaiming the **gospel of freedom**, took root in the fertile soil of our founders' minds.

They established a government, **our constitution states:** [quote]

"to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, ... and secure the blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity...."

What blessings indeed-----**freedom--liberty--independence!**

Then our question for ourselves and our posterity must be:

What are we being led to do this election year to uphold and strengthen **the spirit of independence?**

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.