

A Declaration of Inter-dependence

Text: Psalm 33:16-17; Romans 12:21; Matthew 5:44

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Transcription of the spoken sermon

We celebrate 222 years of existence as a nation, born as an experiment in human freedom, a nation in which the government was of, for and by the people. The ideal of our founders was a magnificent vision worthy to be celebrated in public festivals and to be reflected on in Divine worship because, while the early framers of our founding documents were not evangelical Christians as is loudly claimed in some quarters today, their vision was grounded in the biblical vision of humankind created by God, not only the ground of all reality but the source and enlivening presence of all life, including human life - a Creator Who is the guarantor of human dignity and freedom.

Our founding vision was a radical experiment, to be understood in the background of the European origin of the nation, a background of Divine Right of kings and nobility and human domination. The American experiment was an attempt to limit government and vastly restrict its arena of operation. The early documents resonate with lofty idealism and there is too little appreciation of the greatness of that founding vision.

It was flawed from the beginning; it had its limitation of the radical nature of the freedom it was espousing and has been in a process of development over the 222 years of our national existence. But we have been blessed to have entered into the fruit of that vision, for which we give God thanks.

The Declaration of Independence, the claim of national sovereignty, was a bold and daring act in the 18th century. *As the 21st century dawns, an equally bold and daring act is imperative; it is the declaration of inter-dependence with all nations and peoples of the earth.* Such a claim is not wild-eyed fantasy of a hopelessly idealistic and impractical dreamer. Rather, it is a practical and necessary response to the real situation of our world on the threshold of the Third Millennium.

The most telling image of our situation as humankind on planet earth is the astronaut's picture of the earth taken from outer space - the earth, a beautiful globe of blue and green hanging in the frozen darkness of space - obviously an

inter-related, inter-connected whole. The picture gives vivid witness to the commentary of the astronaut who says there are no real barriers or divisions; the earth is one; a planetary unity.

What the picture of the earth as a whole points to is being realized in actual human experience. The amazing accomplishments of technology have put the world's people into instant communication. Travel exposes us to the whole rich diversity of the human community. What happens in one part of the world impacts every part. We cannot wash our hands of the ongoing tensions in the Middle East, not turn our backs on the anguish of the Balkan states.

The ecological concern for the well-being of the environment can only be addressed from a global perspective and nuclear non-proliferation is essential for the whole global family.

Speaking of the drive toward one world totally intertwined is not fantasizing about what might be, but simply being responsible before what is; and the best place to see it is in the actuality of a global economy. Multinational corporations and international banking are a reality. The move to one currency in the European community is only a symbol of the interlocked economics of the world.

We bail out Mexico, cajole and press Indonesia and support the Japanese yen - not because we are an altruistic nation wanting to help those in distress, but because we are invested literally around the globe and need a healthy global economy to keep our own GNP in good shape.

As the Third Millennium approaches and the 21st century breaks upon us, it is time for a declaration of inter-dependence.

It would be foolhardy to think that we, the USA, the world's only present superpower could insulate and isolate ourselves from the rest of the earth in the ongoing development of the cosmic drama and the human story. These are not far out ideas.

The Fourth of July in Flint was marked by picketers with American flags. We are witnessing a serious social situation in our own state that is impacting not only Michigan, but the nation. What is the underlying reality? It is not a simple matter. One can fume at General Motors - giving the store away in the past. One can fume at the UAW - bringing on what they claim they are trying to avoid. But, General Motors cannot go on as is. And autoworkers in Flint are human beings being disrupted and dislocated.

I mention this not to take sides or examine all the issues involved - and it is very complex; rather, to show that this kind of crisis close to home has to do with globalization.

Some philosophers and theologians suggest that we must dismantle the global networks of industry and economics, return to small regional communities of production and consumption, nurturing local customs and ethnic diversity. They rail against globalization as the loss of particular cultural identities and want to stop the whole process toward one world.

I understand, but I don't think that will happen. There is a tide, broad and powerful, that is sweeping us toward one world, totally inter-related. It seems to me what we must do is not throw up barriers against ongoing development, but rather, seek ways to make the future humane, just and peaceful. We need a vision of inter-dependence and then the will to make it happen.

What is needed is a transformation of consciousness. We simply must begin to think differently. We need a prophet to annunciate the new and emerging reality - the global reality of which we are a part. Rather than the reactionary rhetoric of the religious Right that is attempting to re-invent yesterday, we need someone to help us find a new orientation in a new cultural situation. Rather than a fearful, defensive posture that is marked by a militant mind and hostile spirit, we need to cultivate a global consciousness that thinks of how to make the future more humane, more just, marked by planetary peace.

We are not without resources for such a vision. In 1848 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels published the *Communist Manifesto*. It was focused on economics, but it was really a revolutionary social document. On the 150th anniversary of its publication, a number of works are being published. In an article in *The New York Times*, the present debate was set forth, but what seemed to be commonly agreed on was that Marx did see the relentless power of capital to produce wealth and he did see what we are currently experiencing globally. He failed to see how Capitalism could pull the proletariat into the game and thus avoid what he thought would be inevitable revolution.

Again, here my point is not to argue Marx pro or con, but to suggest that we need such a powerful prophetic visionary in our day.

Where did Marx get his vision?

Communism has been called a biblical heresy. The founding story of Israel is the freedom of a people from domination and ruthless exploitation, and the story is shaped by the Hebrew prophets who envisioned a peaceable kingdom where the lion and the lamb would lie down together. The vision, the passion for justice and human well-being that found expression in a Karl Marx was in that biblical tradition.

We have the biblical story as resource. Psalm 33 celebrates the sovereignty of God who fills the earth with steadfast love. The image of God as Ruler out there - in heaven - controlling the affairs of the nations is not in line with the experience of cosmic movement and historical development, but I believe the Psalmist had

true insight into the human situation - we did not create this world; we are not sovereign, nor can we secure ourselves by human means. The King - the symbol of human sovereignty - is not secured by horses and armies. Military might won't do it. Economic power won't do it. No human reality is impregnable.

God is at the heart of things.

Love is at the heart of things.

Grace - modeled out in God, as we see it revealed in Jesus Christ, is the only way to peace on earth.

Paul, responding to the encounter with the grace of God in Jesus Christ, appealed to followers of Jesus in Rome - on the basis of the mercies of God, to present themselves a sacrifice to God - living, holy, acceptable. This, Paul said, is only logical - it makes sense.

Grace at the core of things, as he had so eloquently written as chapter 11 ends, calls for a transformation of life, a new way of being, not conformed to the structures and forms of this world, but transformed by the renewing of the mind. A shift in consciousness - that is radical, thinking differently!

Paul, of course, was reflecting Jesus. The Sermon on the Mount is filled with concrete, practical counsel on how to live. Paul said do not meet evil with evil, but overcome evil with good and, obviously, he was trying to counsel a way of being that emulated the way of Jesus who said "No!" to the old code of justice - an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. Rather, "If anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also; and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give her your cloak, as well; and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile."

Again, radically, Jesus declares, Love your enemies.

In short, be God-like, the God who causes rain to fall on the righteous and the unrighteous alike and causes the sun to rise on the good and the evil. That section ends with "Be perfect as God is perfect," and the connotation of the word translated perfect is "mature." In effect, we need to grow up.

Hans Küng brings this radical counsel of Jesus into the concrete circumstances of our day. In his work, *Judaism*, he addresses the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Recognizing the delicacy of any non-Jew dealing with the issue, he nonetheless points to the frequency with which the Likud party, particularly, uses the word retaliation. One must be sensitive to the Israeli position, given the suffering and loss that people has suffered over the centuries. Yet, he wonders if the word of the Jew Jesus is not a better way to the future and peace - not retaliation, but the voluntary renunciation of power and rights.

For many years I did not preach on the Sermon on the Mount. I was not content to interpret it as a code of personal ethics irrelevant to the world of real politics. Yet, it seemed so incredible, so impossible in the real world of international relations. But, the longer I think about these things, the more I am convinced that Jesus' way is the only way there can ever be peace on earth, the realization of the Creator's intention for Shalom - the peaceable kingdom.

If Jesus' way won't work, there is no other way.