

7.4.2021 Trinity 5, Independence Day

When the delegates in attendance at the Second Continental Congress voted in favor of declaring America's independence from Great Britain, John Adams wrote a letter in which he stated that the day should be commemorated "by solemn acts of devotion to God Almighty... with pomp and parade, with shows, games, sports, guns, bells, bonfires, and illuminations from one end of this continent to the other from this time forward forevermore." It's been 245 years since those words were written, and still today, the Fourth of July is known for pomp and parade, for shows, games, sports, guns, bells, bonfires, and illuminations from one end of this continent to the other. Yet here at St. Andrew's, before we celebrate this Independence Day in any other way, we gather as a Christian community to commemorate this day in the first way John Adams called Americans to do so, "by solemn acts of devotion to God Almighty."

Consider this decision we've made to begin our Independence Day celebration by devoting ourselves to God, and take a moment to reflect on the way we'll do so, by approaching the Lord's Table to receive Holy Communion. This morning, our solemn act of devotion will be expressed through table fellowship with the Creator of Heaven and Earth. Before the pomp and parade, we come to the Table to receive the Body and Blood of our Savior Christ. Before the games, the food, and the fireworks, we respond to our Lord's perfect offering of Himself by offering "our selves, our souls and bodies" to Him as a "reasonable, holy, and living sacrifice." The decision to begin Independence Day with this solemn, sacramental act of devotion to God is a powerful way to celebrate America's independence, while acknowledging, and even celebrating, our complete dependence on God, who St. Paul declares, gives to each of us "*life and breath and everything*" (Acts 17:25).

It may seem strange to speak of acknowledging and celebrating our dependence on Independence Day, but truth be told, it is when we're entirely dependent on God that we find true freedom, and while I'm convinced our Founding Fathers would agree with that statement, there's no doubt that American society today would disagree completely. We live in a culture that defines freedom and independence as the right to do whatever you want, whenever you want, however you want, with whoever you want, and while our society calls such independence from God and His commandments freedom, it looks a whole lot more like slavery.

For evidence of that fact, consider the example of Adam and Eve. Let me ask you, when were they truly free? Was it the day that they declared their independence from God? When they pridefully thought (like so many think today) that apart from God they could be like God, able to make their own decisions about what's right and wrong, or could it be true that they were perfectly free before the Fall of Mankind, when they humbly acknowledged their complete dependence on God, lived in union with Him, and were obedient to His commands? When you consider the consequences of their disobedient declaration of independence from God, consequences that God spoke to Eve about, such as increased pain in childbirth and conflict in her relationship with Adam, or consequences that God spoke to Adam about, such as the daily struggle to grow food, the sweat on his face, and, after all of life's difficulties - death. Death entered the world because our first parents chose pride instead of humility, independence instead of dependence, and freedom from God instead of union with Him (Genesis 3:14-19).

When we consider the consequences, when we look at life inside the Garden before the Fall and outside afterwards, we see clearly that Adam and Eve were truly free when they lived with God inside the boundaries of the Garden, where work was a pleasure, where one man and one woman perfectly completed one another, and where the soul would never leave the body alone in the grave.

Psalm 119:45 states, "*I will walk in freedom, for I have devoted myself to your commandments.*" Like Adam and Eve, who were truly free when they were inside the boundaries of the Garden, we find true freedom when we devote ourselves to God, His Church, and His commandments. We *walk in freedom* when we obediently walk inside the boundaries established by our Creator, guided by the Holy Spirit, relying on the grace of God to keep us free from all of those things that hold this world captive.

It is a bit of a paradox to acknowledge our dependence on Independence Day, and to talk about perfect freedom being found inside the boundaries established by our Creator, but perhaps these truths come to us in this unusual way because God wants us to recognize them. G.K. Chesterton once said, "A paradox is a truth turned on its head so that we will notice it." By the grace of God, as we celebrate our independence, may we be people who "notice" the truth that we are completely dependent on God - *for life and breath and*

everything, because it is only in acknowledging our complete dependence on God that will be truly free to live abundant, thankful lives inside the boundaries that He established for our good and His glory.