

July 7, 2018 FCCS
Rev. Curran Reichert

“Dusty Business”

"Our wretched species is so made that those who walk on the well-trodden path always throw stones at those who are showing a new road." ~Voltaire 18th century

I spend 4th of July in the redwoods of Butano State Park this year. Aside from a slight twinkling of white lights spotted by Ellis Jane in the distance at twilight, and a few campsites flying American Flags, there was little to remind anyone that the 4th of July was any different than the 3rd or the 5th.

I should begin by saying that I am deeply grateful to Lori Anderson and all of those who volunteered in our parking lot on the 4th. You raised \$3,000 for the continuing ministries of this church with your outreach. That is the very definition of generosity and your church thanks you.

Upon my return from the redwoods, I deleted what seemed like hundreds of advertisements for walk-in-bathtubs that had accumulated in my inbox, and caught up on more meaningful things like this from Seth Godin's 4th of July blog post called; [Responsibility Day](#)

*Often mis-characterized as a day of independence.
What actually matters is what you're going to do with it.
It turns out that if you have the power to make rules,
the rules are your responsibility.
If you have the freedom to make choices,
the choices are your responsibility.*

And if you have the ability to change the culture, to connect with others, to make a ruckus, then yes, what you do with that is your responsibility as well.

*Doing nothing is a choice. The thing you didn't say, the project you didn't launch, the hand you didn't lend...
But whatever we do, if we have the independence to do it (or not) is our responsibility.*

The problem with independence is that it can be, and has indeed been, taken to extremes in our country. We have confused independence with **superiority** and the only possible result of superiority thinking is a zero-sum mentality; where in order for one to win, another must lose.

This version of *independence* teeters precariously on a total lack of regard for the **interdependence** at the heart of all great freedom. Interdependence with the earth and all its creatures, with other nations, with other people and our histories. Interdependence in the context of “patriotism” is somehow perceived as weakness rather than a source of strength.

This is where the message of Jesus continues to be profoundly relevant. Building societies of equality and integration, where the greatest of these is no greater than the least, that is the kind of stuff that got Jesus into such trouble with the authorities. Hence those famous words from the Gospel of Mark proclaiming that “prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown.” This passage reminds us that Jesus’ ministry began against the backdrop of zero sum thinking.

In reframing our identity as Christian people in America, it is essential to remember that Jesus intentionally did not align himself with the majority, he sought rather to prepare his followers to better understand what it meant to be part of the family of God, by painting a picture of a new heaven and a new earth.

Jesus was teaching an alternative to zero sum thinking. Which is to say instead of believing that in order for one person to win another must lose—we turn that thinking around to see that by securing a win for one, others also benefit.

Jesus was no fool, he understood that people were self-interested and motivated by self-preservation. If we look closely we will see that within the fabric of all of Jesus’ parables is the reminder that it is not only good medicine to do well by others, it is also what will keep us alive when the tables are turned. But it takes some, if not a lot, of experience with this reality in order to be converted to it. What I have learned is that people move at their own pace and while one can preach, teach, draw, sing and create sign boards with invitations to a new way of thinking, it is ultimately personal experience that opens our eyes and allows us to see what all along has been there.

It was a sunny day in March, the year was 2004. Katie and I were still living in Boston and it was a short drive to the University of New Hampshire to join a crowd of over 4,000 who were gathering to celebrate the installation of the Rev. Gene Robinson as the next Bishop of New Hampshire and the first openly gay prelate in the Episcopal Church U.S.A..

Said an article in The New York Times;

“In ceremony both solemn and celebratory, Bishop Robinson accepted his bishop's stole and chasuble from his parents, the gold miter for his head from his two daughters and his partner, and his shepherd's crook from his predecessor, Bishop Douglas E. Theuner of New Hampshire.

The nearly 4,000 people in an arena at the University of New Hampshire rose to their feet, applauding, cheering and whistling. After Bishop Robinson quieted them, he said, "It's not about me; it's about so many other people who find themselves at the margins."

This is a marvelous illustration of a what it looks like to shift a potential victory for independence to a victory won for the purpose of upholding the interdependence of the Kingdom of God.

Although that moment is sighted as laying the groundwork for a split in the American church and a break with fellow Anglican churches abroad, Robinson famously stated that “in heaven we are all going to get along, God wouldn't have it any other way, so we might as well figure it out now.”

On the way into the auditorium the audience had to travel through metal detectors and security enforcement in full armor, while that was hard to take at a religious affair, harder still were the people outside holding signs saying “God hates Fags” and “Aids is God's punishment for being gay.”

Of course, there were also signs saying “God is Love” and the like, but it was clear that the profiteers of hatred were alive and well.

There is nothing quiet like seeing those signs thrust in your face, accompanied by the spewing vitriol that stings your soul. The irrationality of it all is difficult to picture if you've never experienced it firsthand.

Fast forward to the year 2007. Katie and I are living on a cobblestone lined street in rural Princeton Illinois. It is a sunny day in March and we set out for our morning walk.

Being the only “out” couple in town and having become very public persons in Princeton (for better and worse), we were on guard at all times to some degree, but what we saw that morning sent our hearts racing.

At the end of the street was a small, very beautiful catholic church. An enormous crowd of mourners had gathered for the funeral of a fallen army Lieutenant who was in his early twenties, a town hero of sorts.

This was of course notable, but more striking were the twenty or so motorcyclists with flags reading “Freedom Riders” circling the perimeter of the crowd. They were there specifically to shelter the parishioners from having to encounter those same nasty signs that Katie and I stood nose to nose with years earlier. Added to the statements on hatred toward gays were sentiments like “War is God’s punishment for homosexuality,” and “God hates soldiers.”

This little town in rural Illinois had become a target for this anti-Semitic, anti-Catholic, anti-America, and yes anti-gay hate mongering group that identifies as the Westborough Baptist Church.

All of the sudden people who had previously been on the side of casting stones at those who were not like them, had become victims of stone throwing and the result was a need to examine the *I win you lose, or if you win I lose mentality* that had become as comfortable as breathing to the majority of Princetonians.

The Gospel writers seemed to have known that issues of superiority and interdependence would surface in each generation as they have throughout time. This is our time. What will we make of our responsibility?

Amen