

**Today's Text      Psalm 13**

How long, O God?

Will you forget me forever?

How long will you hide your face  
from me?

How long must I bear pain  
in my soul,

and have sorrow in my heart  
all day long?

How long shall my enemy  
be exalted over me?

Consider and answer me,  
O God, my God!

Give light to my eyes,  
or I will sleep  
the sleep of death,

and my enemy will say,  
"I have prevailed";  
my foes will rejoice  
because I am shaken.

But I trusted  
in your steadfast love;  
my heart shall rejoice  
in your salvation.

I will sing to the Lord,  
because God has dealt bountifully  
with me.

July 1, 2020

FCCS Rev. Curran Reichert How Many Moons?

“How many moons in our solar system? With 8 or so planets, how many moons in total?”

My guess, when challenged, was 22. I figured Earth had one, rounded up, etc.

It turns out that it's more than 200. Saturn alone has more than 80 moons.

That's a common mistake. We make it all the time. We assume that our neighborhood is like every neighborhood, that our situation and experience is universal. That's rarely true.” Seth Godin

I have never particularly liked the Fourth of July. For starters, I don't like loud noise and I can't stand firecrackers. As a kid it never made sense to me that pyrotechnics were “illegal,” but you could still buy them at any ol' roadside stand on the Hwy for weeks leading up to the holiday.

A firecracker once exploded in my cousins his eye, another year my brother's hand was badly burned. When my favorite cat disappeared one Fourth of July weekend, it was rumored that our neighbors - the Santacrose boys- had frightening the cat to death with firecrackers. I didn't doubt it for a minute. I can safely say, I have never understood the attraction to the Fourth of July.

As a child, the history of the celebration was lost on me because no one ever really made mention of it, or if they did- I wasn't listening. In elementary school I learned that the Fourth of July celebrated the signing of the Declaration of Independence, which was written by Thomas Jefferson, and signed on July 4, 1776. That was the year that Continental Congress declared that the thirteen American colonies were no longer subject to the rule of the monarchy in Britain. Woohoo! I, like many of you I imagine, dutifully swore the Pledge of Allegiance and marched around waving tiny American flags.

This is where Seth Godin's words ring particularly true, “We assume that our neighborhood is like every neighborhood, that our situation and experience is universal.”

I never questioned anyone's excitement about the Fourth of July. I thought how it looked on my block was how it looked everywhere, all hamburgers and water gun fights...

Here are the things I was never taught:

- That Fourth of July celebrations add acid to injury for the native populations displaced from their lands between 1625 and the late 1700's.
- I was never taught that those same native peoples were enslaved by a system that was legal in all the colonies prior to the American Revolutionary War.
- I also wasn't not taught, nor do I imagine most of you were, that Thomas Jefferson held slaves with whom he fostered children, whom he also kept as slaves.

I was not taught that enslaved people, both native and those stolen and imported from Africa built this fine country of ours. And until recently, I had not read the great orator Fredrich Douglass' speech from July 5<sup>th</sup>, 1852. Wherein he told his all white audience that, "This Fourth of July is *yours*, not *mine*. *You* may rejoice, I must mourn."

What, to the American slave, is your 4th of July? I answer; a day that reveals to him, more than all other days in the year, the gross injustice and cruelty to which he is the constant victim. To him, your celebration is a sham; your boasted liberty, an unholy license; your national greatness, swelling vanity; your sound of rejoicing are empty and heartless; your denunciation of tyrants brass fronted impudence; your shout of liberty and equality, hollow mockery; your prayers and hymns, your sermons and thanks-givings, with all your religious parade and solemnity, are to him, mere bombast, fraud, deception, impiety, and hypocrisy -- a thin veil to cover up crimes which would disgrace a nation of savages. There is not a nation on the earth guilty of practices more shocking and bloody than are the people of the United States, at this very hour."

No, this is not what I was taught... were you?

Every summer my family spent many a happy camping trip in our orange Volkswagen van exploring the great National Parks across this country. One of our favorite stops was Mt. Rushmore, which I have visited more than once, one year even on the fourth of July- that was loud!

Perhaps you learned, but I did not, that Mt. Rushmore which features the heads of George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Theodore Roosevelt, and Abraham Lincoln, also known as the “Shrine of Democracy”, is seen by the Lakota-Sioux Indian tribe as a desecration of their sacred mountain and a breach of contract.

Did you know that the Black Hills area was part of the Fort Laramie Treaty which assigned the mountain range, along with a larger area, to the Native tribes of the land. But in 1877, the United States broke that treaty because they found gold in the Black Hills? I didn't, I understand now, only because of further research that the Lakota peoples were offered financial compensation in 1980, but they refused, because the only thing they wanted back was their land.

Can you see how easy it is to believe that what is normal to us, is normal to everyone?

The key to moving forward as faithful, hopeful people is to understand that our past need not define us, but it must, my friends, inform us if we are to build a more united nation that is indeed for all people, indivisible under God.

Today's sacred text is from the Psalmist who cries out to God in pain, How long O God, how long?

I know many of you are feeling that way today because of the pandemic we know as Covid-19. You have missed graduations, birthday parties, anniversaries, and family reunions.

Fortunately, our congregation has not, as yet, lost a single life to Covid-19 and that is due in large part to your diligence in staying home, wearing masks, exercising physical distancing- remember that you are loving one another by staying safe.

This is another one of those moments when it is important to remember that that our situation and experience is not universal. We must understand that black, brown, and poor bodies are being disproportionately affected by this pandemic.

Every time, the majority insists that things go back to “normal,” we are also insisting that low income earners go back to work in dangerous conditions.

In this country it has been and is still a requirement that people of color and poor individual put their lives on the line in service to a predominantly white nations expectation. We can do better than that.

In the era of access to all kinds of instant information it is not enough to say “I never knew”, because if we wanted to know we could, and we would.

As faithful people we must come to terms with the fact that any nation that ignores more than half of its population is deep in the throes of more than a national health pandemic, it is in the throes of a moral and yes, spiritual crisis? Our current political climate speaks volumes about our country’s interpretation of freedom.

Beloved, there is little to celebrate in this nation until the damage done to indigenous and previously enslaved peoples of this land is acknowledged and healed. There is little to celebrate in the wealthiest nation on earth until all people of ever race and nationality are adequately housed, educated, and supported in an equitable manner.

While we are stuck at home there is much to consider friends: may this be a Fourth of July, that we commit to understanding that everyone’s experience in this nation is not the same.

May this be the Fourth of July that we are able to say once and for evermore that everyone, everyone is deserving of our nation’s abundance. Whether or not that’s a politically popular version of justice- That is God’s justice. Good people of faith, hold out for a justice that is worthy of the kingdom of God. Then and only then will this day be a cause for celebration.

In the strong name of Jesus we pray- Amen