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4th of July 2022

Grace Episcopal Church

The Gospel

Matthew 5:43-48

Jesus said, “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

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May the words of my mouth and the meditation of all our hearts be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, our strength, and our redeemer. Amen.

Good morning, Church.

The observance of Independence Day commemorates the signing of the Declaration of Independence on July 4, 1776.

Of the 56 signers, 32 were Anglicans who later became Episcopalians. Our Episcopal roots are intimately linked with the birth of this nation.

+Our Gospel reading for this Feast of Independence Day—comes from the Sermon on the Mount—where Jesus begins his ministry by revealing what the world would look like if we chose to live into His teachings.

By calling us to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us, Jesus reminds us that His way, GOD’s way, is different than the ways of this world

Jesus calls on us to examine our lives—and to consider how our thinking and beliefs **inform** the ways we live and love one another.

So... How's it going? How **-is-** our thinking and believing informing how we live and love?

Though our Declaration of Independence **professes** that **all** men are created equal, 247 years later - the lived reality of **many** in our country reveals **stark, and often dangerous**, inequalities.

Do we believe what was professed? Do we believe that all men **are** created equal?

Recent events have left many of us heavyhearted—and struggling to love our enemies.

We **all** have watched in terror—as time and again, hatred and violence has burst into our everyday lives—in our grocery stores, in our places of worship, and in our schools—just to name a few...

But God calls us to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us. God calls us into a different way of being in this world.

America is full of beautiful, **and** broken, places **and** people. Cracks that divide us—male and female, race from race, and rich

from poor, seem to grow ever wider.

The ideals and virtues expressed in our Declaration of Independence are not yet reflected in the realities we face as a nation.

Christians aren't called to ignore this. We are called to look for how what is broken might be healed and redeemed with God's help and our participation.

We are called to see our truth—our whole story —not just what's convenient and comfortable.

We are called to see as God sees—for only when we face truth will we find healing and wholeness.

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God **created** and **loves** our whole human family—in **all** our diversity—and yet we cling to those most like us.

God **loves** and **lifts up** those who are poor, sick, troubled, and outcast. And God calls us to be His hands and feet in their service. Yet, all around us, there is hunger, there are people living in bondage, and there are **many** who have fallen through the cracks of our society.

God **tells us** that wealth and possessions can draw us dangerously far away from God. And still the gap between the rich and poor grows ever wider.

And God reveals to us in the life of Jesus, that it is radical love— **not** violence—that is the most powerful agent of change for our broken world.

+ We are called to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us. +

Do our lives reflect this teaching in the Sermon on the Mount? Do we seek God's will through prayer—refrain from judging each other—seek justice for all—and care for those in need?

+++On his way to the cross, Jesus broke bread with his disciples and showed us how to be in loving communion with one another.

In the breaking of the bread, Jesus shows us it is possible to be grateful for who we are and what we have received, while recognizing we are not yet living into the fullness of who we were created to be.

We can allow this time to be for Celebration **and** Confession.

We can ask for forgiveness for the exploitation of our natural resources, while giving thanks for the beautiful and bountiful land we inhabit.

We can work toward a more just society for ALL people, while giving thanks for the visionaries, artists, politicians, peacemakers, and **soldiers** who have fought for what they believe with integrity, humility, and courage.

There is so much to be grateful for...

So... on this Independence Day, let us be filled with gratitude—

and make room for lament.

The Good News is that God is with us—loving us and giving us everything we need to do this work.

On this Independence Day, may the abundant gifts of this nation draw us back to the **source of it all**—the God of all creation.

Not only are we equal in God's eye—but we are, each and every one of us—a beloved child of God.