

Sermon Notes: Proper 9AM/Independence Day Weekend 2026

https://lectionarypage.net/YearA_RCL/Pentecost/AProp9_RCL.html
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O God, you have taught us to keep all your commandments by loving you and our neighbor: Grant us the grace of your Holy Spirit, that we may be devoted to you with our whole heart, and united to one another with pure affection; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Zechariah 9:9-12

Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion!

Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem!

Lo, your king comes to you;

triumphant and victorious is he,

humble and riding on a donkey,

on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

He will cut off the chariot from Ephraim

and the war horse from Jerusalem;

and the battle bow shall be cut off,

and he shall command peace to the nations;

his dominion shall be from sea to sea,

and from the River to the ends of the earth.

As for you also, because of the blood of my covenant with you,

I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit.

Return to your stronghold, **O prisoners of hope;**

today I declare that I will restore to you double.

Romans 7:15-25a

I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.

Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good. But in fact it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. **I can will what is right, but I cannot do it.** For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me.

So I find it to be a law that when I want to do what is good, evil lies close at hand. **For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members.** Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!

Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30

Jesus said to the crowd, "To what will I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to one another,

'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance;
we wailed, and you did not mourn.'

For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon'; the Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' Yet **wisdom is vindicated by her deeds.**"

At that time Jesus said, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

"Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.

Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

[SCRIPTURE NOTES]

[In Zechariah (a reading you might recognize from Palm Sunday)]

Lo, your king comes to you;

triumphant and victorious is he,

humble and riding on a donkey...

He will cut off the chariot from Ephraim

and the war horse from Jerusalem;

and the battle bow shall be cut off,

and he shall command peace to the nations;

2 visions of Leadership

2 contrasting Kings

1-Imperial Rule, characterized by power and military victory

1-Messianic Rule, characterizing by humility and peace

In Romans

I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate...

I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do.

So I find it to be a law that when I want to do what is good, evil lies close at hand.

Not slavery to personal sin, but slavery to systemic sin

Problem is not weak self-control, but power of empire-control

In Matthew

Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.]]

INTRO

Acknowledge “peril” of preaching 4th of July weekend

Words like “Freedom” and “Liberty” get top billing in our 4th of July celebrations, alongside fireworks and parades and hot dogs and beer and the star spangled banner and red white and blue.

Concepts like Freedom & Liberty also figure prominently in the Bible....while there is some overlap (and I’m in favor of both) they are not identical.

The Freedom & Liberty of our Nation ≠ Freedom & Liberty of the Kingdom of God

PAUL BOOK

Greg & Noralynn Hassold are leading a book study on ***In Search of Paul: How’s Jesus’s Apostle Opposed Rome’s Empire with God’s Kingdom (John Dominic Crossan & Jonathan Reed)***

In the final chapter

CROSSAN AND REED: Invite readers to imagine a model of 3 GIANT TECTONIC PLATES beneath the geological earth AND our historical world (I would describe them as 3 visions...determine how we view and how we act in the world)

1. # 1: “Normalcy”... or human CIVILIZATION in all its imperial inevitability
 - a. Crossan & Reed: CIVILIZATION:; Motto: PEACE BY VICTORY
 - b. (Tribal, National or Imperial Vision) **Peace**, FOR SOME (FOR US) **by VICTORY**
2. # 2: Anti-Civilization; nihilism, totalitarianism, terrorism
 - a. Crossan & Reed: ANTICIVILIZATION: Motto: PEACE BY DEATH
 - b. (Individual Vision) Motto: **Peace** FOR ME **by DEATH**
3. # 3 : Post-Civilization: utopian, eschatological,
 - a. Crossan & Reed: POSTCIVILIZATION:: **Peace by JUSTICE**
 - b. (Universal and Divine, Vision, KINGDOM OF GOD): **Peace** FOR ALL (NOT ONLY ALL PEOPLE, BUT ALL CREATION) **by JUSTICE** (not retributive justice...not by human judgement and

punishment and retribution, but distributive justice... as radical, universal, global equal, equitable, fair, divine grace.

You can see that both the MEANS and the MEANING—and for that matter the SCOPE- of Peace differ significantly between these three spheres.

Likewise the MEANS and the MEANING and SCOPE of Freedom and Liberty differ between these three spheres.

The author's point is NOT that Civilization is Evil. The point is NOT that a Tribal, or National, or even Imperial identity is necessarily inherently wrong. In fact, I think they would argue that it is an inevitable—perhaps even necessary— part of how humanity works. They write:

“Rome was not the evil empire of its ancient time. Rome was not the axis of evil in its Mediterranean place. Rome was not the worst thing that had ever happened to its preindustrial world. Rome was simply the normalcy of civilization within first-century options and the inevitability of globalization within first-century limits....Who they were there and then, we are here and now. We are, at the start of the twenty-first century, what the Roman Empire was at the start of the first century.” (In Search of Paul, 412)

We might argue about whether any given tribe, or nation or even any given empire—Babylonian, Assyrian, Roman, Russian, British, American— is good or evil in any given decision or action or moment. But if we're honest, we'll probably have to admit: Even the most Evil Empire probably did a few good things. And even the most Luminous, Shining City on a Hill probably had a few cloudy days. And even the greatest nation on earth, in its very best moment on its very best day, still falls short of the Kingdom of God. The Pax Romana, impressive as it might be, has limits that do not apply to the Shalom of God. The Freedom of the Sons and Daughters of Liberty, inspiring as it might be, has limits that do not apply to the Freedom of the Children of God.

SO WHAT?

We are, of course, BOTH citizens of earthly nations AND children of God, and we bear rights and responsibilities as both.

As members of the Episcopal Church, our Baptismal Vows compel us to “persevere in resisting evil” and to “strive for justice and peace”---and these obligations have obvious political and practical, as well as spiritual implications.

But if we occasionally find ourselves sinking into despair in the face of the sin and evil that seems to control the nations of the world—including, at some times, our own—it may be helpful for us to to reframe our responsibility and redirect our focus:

In their book, Crossan & Reed say this:

“Our proposal is that both Jesus and Paul are not so much trapped in a negation of global imperialism as engaged in establishing its positive alternative here below upon this earth.” (In Search of Paul, 409)

“Paul...like Jesus before him, had a divinely mandated program that secondarily and negatively resisted imperial Rome, but that primarily and positively incarnated global justice on the local, ordinary, and everyday level. Here and now.” (In Search of Paul, 412)

Could it be, then, that WE (like Paul and Jesus and the Prophets before him),
Could it be that WE (as followers of Jesus and living members of the Body of Christ);
could it be that WE , are called to participate in a “divinely mandated program” that
“secondarily and negatively” resists and opposes the evil and sinful aspects of the governing empires of our own day, but that ***“primarily and positively incarnates global justice on the local, ordinary, and everyday level. Here and now.”***

CONCLUSION

In Today’s Gospel reading we hear Jesus say:

Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

Wearing “ A YOKE” might not sound much like Freedom.

And the burden of a calling to ***incarnate global justice on the local, ordinary, and everyday level*** may sound neither easy nor light.

But the yoke of Christ is freely chosen—the yoke of Christ is never imposed
“Take my yoke upon you”, Jesus says—choose to join in my labor, my friend, if you will.

Hard work, freely chosen, is different from slavery.

Hard work, freely chosen, and undertaken in the service of Life is in fact an EXPRESSION an EMBODIMENT of Liberty

And when we’re yoked to in our labors to Jesus, the Prince of Peace, the Lord of Life, we never labor alone...and we never labor in vain.

In today’s first reading we hear the Prophet Zechariah say:

Return to your stronghold, O prisoners of hope

Being a “PRISONER” might not sound much like Freedom.

But, as with those who choose Christ’s Yoke, so, for Hope’s Prisoners, Freedom comes from their *choice*.

As followers of Christ, as children of God, as citizens of God’s Kingdom: True Freedom means we have the power to choose.

Freedom means we have the power to choose Life-giving Limits, Freedom means we can choose to be Prisoners—not of despair, or cynicism, or greed, or pride, or fear, or empire—Freedom means we can choose to be Prisoners of Hope.

Freedom means we can choose to allow a Vision of God’s Kingdom—a vision of Peace and Freedom THROUGH Justice—for ALL of Creation to shape how we view and direct how we act in the world

Freedom means we can choose to embrace the yoke of Life-giving Labor; and labor with Christ to incarnate justice and to bring forth Peace and Freedom in every circumstance ***on the local, ordinary, and everyday level, here and now.***

Freedom means we can choose to be Prisoners of Hope. And as Prisoners of Hope we can choose to believe that true Peace and Freedom and Liberty and Justice are possible. And we can choose to continually devote our lives and labors to making true Peace and Freedom and Liberty and Justice a reality: Not just for our friends, not just for our neighbors, not just for our country, but for all of Creation. And not by ourselves. But through Christ, and with Christ, and in Christ, in the Unity of the Holy Spirit. Now and forever. Amen.