

"Peace Be Upon You"
Galatians 6:1-16 Luke 10:1-7
July 3, 2022
York Center Church of the Brethren
Jonathon Shively Preaching

Good morning. It's good to see you here today, both in person and on Zoom. Given the holiday weekend, I honestly wasn't sure if anyone other than Prudy, Bob, Sharon, Jim and I would be here.

Yes, it is a holiday weekend. Tomorrow is July 4th, of course. In some churches today there no doubt is a full-on display of Christian nationalism, celebrating the events that gave our the United States its independence and set it on course toward this moment in our nation's history.

This sanctuary is noticeably absent an American flag, as were all the churches that I grew up in. That is not the case in many CoB churches. We Brethren have a varying and paradoxical relationship with the nation-state. We tend to be thankful for the religious freedoms afforded our tradition while remaining cautiously ambivalent about how close we dare be to politics, public office, and the central square's discourse.

This preamble to today's message is primarily to say, we won't be singing the Star Spangled Banner today or reciting the Pledge of Allegiance. But you are invited each in your own way to recognize the significance of this national holiday and wrestle with its meaning in relation to your faith.

For our family, the extended weekend has been an opportunity to get out and do a little camping. We began our stay at the lovely Paul Wolfe Campground, located in Kane County's Burnidge Forest Preserve. The convenience of having our little camper at a site less than five miles from our house is that we could enjoy the change of pace that camping affords, while also going to work and generally keeping up with some responsibilities we had this week.

Still it is one of my joys of life, to step away from the routines and environments of the daily grind (as rewarding and inspiring as that may be at times) and to settle into this "other world."

Sitting on the picnic bench and reading today's texts, I wondered what it would be like to approach our neighboring campers with the message that Jesus sent out the 70 with.

Picture your own neighborhood. Would you be comfortable approaching each door with this message: the kingdom of God is near?

I found myself thinking, gee, I'd like to know more about these neighbors, get to know them better, and then maybe see how receptive they are to the Christian message. You know, figure out the "right" way to talk with them about Jesus.

Well here's where the Gospel story gets tough. The disciples are sent out to share Jesus' message. The message is noncontingent. It is the same for everyone. They weren't given instructions on how to contextualize the news, or to decide what to say based on who they would meet, but were expected to consistently deliver to everyone a message of God's kingdom and Christ's peace

A better preacher or speaker will learn something about their audience and craft their message toward them; the risk is that the message is meant to *please* the audience or congregation. For Jesus' disciples, they were to proclaim the same message whether or not it could be expected to be well-received. (a tragedy of covid is the number of pastors who have quit; the great resignation; many of those found that a gospel message that challenged a political or personal agenda was rejected, and so was the preacher.)

Where the message is delivered in such a direct and specific manner, the impetus is on God to open the hearts, minds, and spirits of the receiver. The message spoken, being present in person, and the private/public witness of the disciple is all that is required. This is sufficient for God's purpose.

Of course it doesn't work for everyone. In fact the response to those who won't receive the message is clear; shake the dust off your feet and move on to the next. It seems a bit harsh, and for basic compassion, physical need, and just outcomes, it isn't adequate. But for Jesus' journey toward Jerusalem, it is what is needed. This invitation to the unveiling of God's kingdom.

The message is radically other-worldly. The kingdom of God is unlike the present world, and its manifestation is comprehensively established as a human experience alternative. As Galatians states, the new creation is everything.

July 4th is perhaps an opposite of this otherworldly vision; it is the celebration of an ideal violently fought for and a nation-state consumed by its own importance.

Describing this other world is difficult. Sometimes it's couched as "secular vs sacred" but that seems inadequate; "sacred vs profane" is another categorization that doesn't quite seem to cut it. Whatever world we are in now borders this other world, this kingdom world.

Stories of God

by Rainer Marie Rilke.

I have another friend here in the neighborhood. This is a fair-haired, lame man who has his chair, summer and winter, close by the window. He can look very young; in his listening face there is often something boyish. But there are also days on which he ages, when

the minutes pass over him like years, and suddenly he is an old man, whose dim eyes have already almost let go of life. We have known each other long. At first we always looked at each other, later we smiled involuntarily, for a whole year we bowed, and since God knows when we have been telling each other one thing and another, indiscriminately, just as it happens.

"Good morning," he called as I came by, his window still being open, out into the rich and quiet autumn. "I have not seen you for a long time."

"Good morning, Ewald--" I stepped up to his window as I always did in passing. "I was away."

"Where have you been?" he asked with impatient eyes.

"To Russia."

"Oh, so far--" he leaned back, and then: "What kind of a country is it, Russia? Very large, isn't it?"

"Yes," I said, "it is large and besides--"

"Was that a stupid question?" smiled Ewald, and he blushed.

"No, Ewald, on the contrary. Your asking, what kind of country is it? Makes various things clear to me. For instance, how Russia is bounded."

"On the East?" my friend threw in.

I reflected: "No."

"On the North?" inquired the lame man.

"You see," -- I had an inspiration-- "the reading of maps has spoiled people. There, everything is flat and level, and when they have noted the four points of the compass, they think

that's all. But a country is no map. It has mountains and precipices. It must touch against something both above and below."

"Hm--" my friend considered. "You are right. On what could Russia border in those two directions?" Suddenly the invalid looked like a boy.

"You've got it!" I exclaimed.

"Perhaps on God?"

*"Yes," I confirmed, "on God."*²

We think we should be able to see this new kingdom, but Jesus isn't showing us the map as much as showing us the way. And Jesus is on a different playing field.

It's like when we meet someone who has a wholly other depth of knowledge, insight, and wisdom on something that we thought was familiar to us. Friend Mike sent this message yesterday (see texts)

We are invited to a world that we can only see in part, a world that is not so much a place as a person, a being, a full essence, that of God.

A primary characteristic of this other world is peace. This peace is the hallmark of Jesus' ministry.

Peace to this house - Lk

Peace be upon them (those who follow the rules of the new creation) - Ga

Not a peace that is the absence of war, although I surely think that such deathly violence is a device of satan. Not a peace that denies the complexities of being human. A peace that is given as a gift for those who follow Jesus and believe in the power of the God who confronts all the sources of death and and overcomes them.

Former Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams writes about this kingdom peace in his book *Tokens of Trust: An Introduction to Christian Belief*.

I am convicted that Jesus' call to Jerusalem, the call the cross, is an invitation to not only another way, but essentially another world. It is a world which borders closely on our daily lives, and when we open our spirits to the pass-through, we touch God.

On this Fourth of July weekend, I am holding to the hope and affirmation that there is another way for us, one that is so radically different that still too few can see it. I'm not sure that I see it, I know I don't see it fully, but I long for that transformation that will unleash the full measure of God's love for us all.

I was tempted to end this sermon with the corny charge: may the fourth be with you. But I will resist and instead say, may you receive the blessing of peace as those who live in the new creation.

Amen.