

## **Interdependence and The Deepest Belonging**

Psalm 67 and Acts 2:1-5

July 4, 2021

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*O God, be merciful to us and bless us,  
show us the light of your countenance and come to us.*

*Let your ways be known upon earth,  
your saving health among all nations.*

*Let the peoples praise you, O God;  
let all the peoples praise you.*

*Let the nations be glad and sing for joy,  
for you judge the peoples with equity  
and guide all the nations upon earth.*

*Let the peoples praise you, O God;  
let all the peoples praise you.*

*The earth has brought forth its increase;  
may you, O God our God, bless us.*

*May you bless us,  
and may all the ends of the earth stand in awe of you*  
- Psalm 67 Inclusive Language Psalter

*When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability. Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem.*  
*Acts 2:1-5 NRSV*

Happy 4<sup>th</sup> of July! What memories come up for you when you think of past celebrations?

Growing up, it was a day we always had our cousins from Los Angeles come to our house in Orange County for bbq, swimming and fireworks. And homemade ice cream with the crank and rock salt. Fireworks in the street we bought at the stand down the street. Great food, time with cousins and friends, celebrating a holiday, maybe thinking a bit about what being an American meant.

A friend wrote her memories –

There has been a parade down the main street in my neighborhood, featuring floats designed by local businesses, the elementary and middle school principals perched on convertibles, patriot essay contest winners waving out car windows, boy scouts on a giant

structure, bands on flatbeds, and the bright red fire truck at the end, followed immediately by all the neighborhood kids who decked out their bikes with streamers and balloons pedaling furiously and ringing their bicycle bells. The whole parade folds in on itself as the spectators fill the street and flow down the hill into the park. (1)

Not this year here or most places. Maybe some picnics. Not many parades. And certainly no fireworks in our dry drought parched lands.

Today is a day to think about our country and who we are as Americans. Our country is a nation among nations. "Nation" is a rather common word in the Bible. "Nation" appears 127 times. Israel is called "a nation." God promises Abram – "I will make of you a great nation." That will be the people of Israel. Before the people were on a piece of land, they were a nation. "Nations" appears 467 times - 56 of those in the book of Psalms. Many Psalms are praising God of all the nations, including Psalm 67 and 46. One God. One source of divine presence, of guidance and blessing.

It is interesting to consider what it means to belong to a faith tradition where God can be seen as the God of all nations, not just one.

Last year and this year, in stripping us of many of the rituals we're accustomed to for July 4th, we're given the chance to look closer, to reassess the meaning of the traditions we practice, to let that meaning meet us anew.

Of all the ways human being group themselves, I think about what it means that we here have decided to group ourselves this way - as these united states - so we are building something together that takes all of us. We do our part, each of us in this collective, by voting for our leaders, and by speaking out and working for change when our nation's behavior doesn't match our ideals. We do our part by helping our neighbors and investing in our communities, and by reexamining our history and being purposeful about our future. We do our part by welcoming each other, because our diversity is our strength.

In declaring **independence** from Britain, this new country was declaring **Interdependence** with each other. Our founders were daring to risk the idea of a democracy where everyone has a voice, every voice matters, and we all work to uphold the dignity and liberty of one another. The premise is that we need one another, and for better and worse, we are in this with each other. We are Americans - you are, and I am, and so are the people who refuse to be vaccinated because is no virus, and the people who are hoarding power, and the people in overlooked and under-resourced communities, the wealthy and the poor, the sick and the well, the young and the old, strangers nearby and friends far away.

We are Americans together - brand new arrivals and people who can trace their origins back hundreds of years to ancestors brought as prisoners on slave ships, or to immigrants seeking a

new life on pilgrim ships, or to conquerors arriving on explorer ships to stake a foreign monarch's claim, or people whose foremothers and fathers watched all these ships land on the shores of the place they belonged to already. It's messy to be a nation, especially a democracy. It's hard--and it never gets easier. (2)

But our nation has been set up to keep adapting, keep learning, keep changing.

The Declaration of Independence states,

*We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.--That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, --That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.* [Full Document - Declaration of the Independence](#)

**This is an ongoing project. It's a daily choice. To love our country and to keep working to make it better. I think that is Patriotism.**

I like Dan Rather's quote:

*"It is important not to confuse "patriotism" with "nationalism." As I define it, nationalism is a monologue in which you place your country in a position of moral and cultural supremacy over others. Patriotism, while deeply personal, is a dialogue with your fellow citizens, and a larger world, about not only what you love about your country but also how it can be improved. Unchecked nationalism leads to conflict and war. Unbridled patriotism can lead to the betterment of society. Patriotism is rooted in humility. Nationalism is rooted in arrogance."* (3)

Perhaps this 4th of July, in the vacuum of our many traditions and distractions, we might spend a moment in humble prayer - gratitude for all the good this nation has been and can be, and grief for all the ways our nation has undermined its own goals, and failed to live up to its own ideals.

Then underneath both the gratitude and the grieving, perhaps there is a pause, a chance to remember that in **belonging to God and each other**, fundamentally as human beings, and faithfully as followers of Christ, we can live our identity as Americans from this deeper place.

Did you know that the Declaration of Independence ends with these words? "...with a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor." (Aka, **we belong to God and we belong to each other**).

The early followers of Jesus came from all over the known world at the time to live into a new way of being. One of the most interesting stories in the Bible is the one from Acts 2. People

from every nation had come to Jerusalem for celebration of Pentecost celebration. And something wild happened – understood each other in variety of languages. Spirit unified them. So this movement of the early followers and disciples was not going to be from one nation or one group or one tribe. **They belonged to God and one another** as they sought to live out agape love and shalom rooted in Divine Love.

Maybe calling July 4<sup>th</sup> Independence Day is not helpful or accurate. As a white person, I want to learn more about how this day is not the same for Native Americans or African Americans as it has been for me. I learned this week that Native Americans were prevented from holding their cultural ceremonies for decades. However, many tribes started defying that order and holding annual pow-wows and homecoming ceremonies around July 4<sup>th</sup>. (4)

In 1852, Frederick Douglass called America out on its hypocrisy in his speech, “What, to the slave, is the Fourth of July?” In it, Douglass stated that a country in the throes of slavery has to close its gap between the ideals of the United States and its evil deeds toward people of color. His words still resonate today. President Biden signed into law Juneteenth as a federal holiday, Many African Americans celebrate that historical day more than July 4<sup>th</sup>. (5)

What might we do as we confront this history we may not have known or chosen to ignore?  
How might we open our hearts to God in humility?  
How might our interdependence shape our spirituality?  
How might our deeper belonging guide us as followers of the ways of Jesus  
    who belong to this church, this community of faith  
    and are citizens of this nation among nations?

Close with excerpts from a prayer by Kara Root “We Belong” (6)

We belong  
    first and foremost  
    to you, Lord  
God of heaven and earth,  
eternity and the moment,  
    ever and always.

Then we belong to the whole of creation;  
    the living, the dead,...  
    the ongoing cycle of earth and life  
with its glorious array of ever-expanding participants:  
    mountains and trees and oceans and valleys,  
    gazelles and robins and rivers and earthworms, all.

Next we belong to the human family,  
all humanity in every corner of the vast globe,

all languages, creeds, cultures, skin tones, religions, beliefs, experiences,  
hopes, celebrations, losses, goals,  
vocations, technologies and connections,  
in grief and wonder and anger and happiness and confusion and sadness and joy....

After this we are grouped -  
some arbitrarily and some by choice -  
into land masses and geographic regions.  
We develop identifying accents, clothing preferences and regional taste buds...

We call our places of belonging towns, counties, villages and cities,  
tribes, nations, countries, continents and coalitions;  
these countless designations simply mean that  
we live nearby  
and agree to certain codes of living with one another  
that, in one way or another, uphold our greater belonging -  
to the whole human family,  
the living and the dead of all creation,  
and the Lord of all.

Next we have the smaller groups in which we learn  
and the people there who teach us,  
the neighbors, musicians, coaches and collaborators,  
the members of our faith, our teams, our clans.  
We have hobbies we cultivate with people who practice them alongside us,  
passions we pursue and those whom they impact,  
jobs we end up in and those who end up there too,  
whose lives intertwine with our own.

And then there are those specific people from whom we come,  
the ones whose being and belonging  
shape our own being and belonging most directly,  
I mean, of course,  
our ancestors and grandparents,  
aunts and uncles, cousins and kin,  
parents and siblings.

We may have the partner with whom we share our life,  
and the children whom we shape and watch become,  
and the pets we assemble into our homes,  
and the gardens we tend,  
and the friendships we cultivate, ...

So on this day that celebrates our nation,  
we give thanks for all the belongings that hold us, ...

We give thanks for the communities into which we pour our lives,  
and for all those in our communities that pour their lives into us.

We give thanks for the earth that nurtures all life,  
and all those who nurture the earth.

On this day that celebrates our nation,  
in our collective belonging called The United States of America  
we give thanks for all that is good and wise and kind,  
all that upholds our humanity,  
both individual and shared.  
Thank you, God.

And in our collective belonging called The United States of America  
we confess all that is evil, foolish and divisive,  
all that damages our soul,  
both individual and shared.  
Forgive us, Lord.

And when this day that celebrates our nation  
has come to an end  
in fireworks and fanfare,  
it remains  
that beyond country, beyond kin,  
beyond borders and beliefs,  
beyond any and all boundaries,  
whether natural or unnatural,  
is the Great Belonging,  
that is, to one another, all,  
and to you, Lord of all.

For this, today, we give thanks. Amen.

- 1) Rev. Kara Root, "Interdependence Day," in *thehereandnow*, July 4, 2020  
<https://kara-root.blogspot.com/2020/07/interdependence-day.html>
- 2) Root
- 3) Dan Rather, *What Unites Us: Reflections on Patriotism*, pg. 52
- 4) "Do American Indians Celebrate the 4<sup>th</sup> of July?" *Smithsonian Magazine*, 7/1/20  
<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/blogs/national-museum-american-indian/2020/07/01/do-american-indians-celebrate-4th-july/>
- 5) Rev. Irene More, "After Juneteenth, what does July 4<sup>th</sup> mean for Black Americans?"  
LGBTQ nation, 7/3/21  
<https://www.lgbtqnation.com/2021/07/juneteenth-4th-july-mean-black-americans/>
- 6) Rev. Kara Root, "We Belong," in *thehereandnow*, 7/3/18  
<https://kara-root.blogspot.com/2018/07/a-prayer-for-4th-of-july.html>