

Message  
July 4-5, 2009  
2 Corinthians 12:2-10; Mark 6:1-13  
Revolutionary Freedom  
Hillary T. West

Two hundred and thirty three years ago, on or around July 4, 1776, a revolutionary generation, joined in the creation of an American nation. These brave followers, shared a common belief that a sovereign nation, unhinged from British monarchy, held by a representative government, a nation that resided with the people, sharing an opportunity for individuals to contribute to a market economy, constituted success. The Declaration of Independence, stating unalienable rights, including “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness” was drafted and signed. The canons roared and cheers cried out in thanksgiving that first 4<sup>th</sup> of July celebration. And, we’ve been giving thanks to God for our freedom ever since.

These United States of America came about in what one historian calls, *revolutionary fashion* (Joseph Ellis, The Founding Fathers). This revolutionary time, to this day, is retold through many different lenses. One claim is the Revolution was a movement to freedom from the dominance of Great Britain, releasing us from the oppression of a-ris-to-cratic monarchy, eventually resulting in individual liberty. Another way of understanding the Revolution was a collective surrender of personal, individual interests for the betterment of the “larger purpose” whereby government is formed and used as a tool to assist in national growth and prosperity. This “age of Passion” as it has been called, has resulted in a country where diversity of mind, body and spirit is respected and valued. And, a nation that has stood the test of time as the “oldest enduring republic in world history.” These “Americans” as we were coined by the British, are never again a marginal, peripheral population. Rather, we are a deliberate, intentional, faithful people, who hold firm to the promise of opportunity, justice and freedom.

Freedom is what the disciples celebrate as they revolutionize their world for God in Christ. For the 12 apostles they are the new Israel; a new community of people who have emerged from oppression and suffering as healed, whole pilgrims carving out kingdom possibilities for all those in their path. Theologian, Dominic Crossan refers to this mission group of 12, not as a closed, single group; but rather, a network of faithful, empowered with authority to go out and heal. This new community is named the, “healed healers”. Jesus summons these 12. Now, with a summons, comes the expectation that we will respond; we will act; we’re worthy of the task. Up to this point Jesus’ disciples have pretty much been under his tutelage. They’ve been following, learning, soaking up this kingdom teaching. He told them when he first called them that they would proclaim the message, and have authority and power to heal. But, they didn’t know what that would mean. Now, he gets specific about the job of a disciple.

First, we don’t do this revolution on our own. With Jesus, we’re all about pooling up together. So, he sends us out in pairs, even groups. Two heads, and hearts, are better than one. We need one another. This week you know we’ve celebrated the life and ministry of Keith Mumford, Carol and John Napier’s son. The lessons we’ve learned about living in the freedom of Christ’s kingdom from this

family and their journey to healing are bountiful. But, broadly, I'll tell you that group after group have surrounded Carol and John in their grief. Meals and visits, and more meals, and hugs and tears, listening hearts, and prayers and memories have been shared, over and over again. Lee Mumford, Keith's father, has reported more than once, that the glory of all this has been in the countless people who have cared. This is the face of God. This is the power of Jesus in us.

So Jesus summons. Then he gets us ready. He empowers us, trusting us with his glory. It's an active ministry, Jesus claims. Go, where needed, and, be willing to relocate, he says. Let your staff serve as a sign of the authority I've given you. Moses uses his staff well to lead the people from bondage in Egypt onto the promise land. Elisha's staff is a sign of healing when placed on the face of the Shunammite woman. That's it, though. Don't rely on a lot of gimmicks and devices to get us where we need to go. Map Quest and a GPS won't do it this time. We must trust in God's direction. Now, as Jesus' missionaries, we may not all look alike. We probably won't be wearing matching t-shirts. We're not about identifying ourselves with labels and trademarks. This revolution is about love and humility.

"Take no food, no backpack, no money, no change of clothes," says Jesus. Take next to nothing. When all we have is taken away, we are left with the nothing that opens us up to the abundance we have in the love of Jesus Christ. Nothing is the pathway to the plentifulness of freedom. Removing those things that bring want and desire forms in us one true possession, living a life dependent on Jesus Christ. And, turning to Jesus gives us power and authority in Christ. There's a price to be paid for freedom. But, what we don't always take into account, is *the journey* we travel to liberation. For the founding fathers, while they lived knowing they were the history makers. They weren't always so certain as to what that history would look like in the end. Keeping their eye always on the greater good, the founding fathers of this revolutionary generation ventured out passionately. But, their journey to freedom was not without confusion and doubt.

John Adams, exasperated by such a daunting task, would throw his hands in the air, proclaiming that lawmakers throughout history "legislated for single cities...[now], who," he said, "can legislate for 20 or 30 states, each of which is greater than Greece or Rome at those times?" (Ellis, p. 8). Adams, was born just south of Boston, in the modest household of a farmer and shoemaker. Encouraged by his father Adams studied at Harvard, with the hopes of answering a call to the priesthood. Adams failed to hear the call. Instead, he entered the teaching vocation. In time he married, Abigail, and together, they answered the summons to serve as an advocate for the colonists. Adams lived his life plagued with doubt about his ability. And yet, he was steadfast, combative and even "combustible" in his mission as a servant for the freedom of the American people.

Missionaries often are not popular. We come with a message of hope, a message that calls for change. Not everyone wants to hear the message. When Jesus travels home with his disciples, he's not well received. His preaching and teaching fall on deaf ears in an atmosphere of coldness and indifference. Often, the familiar way, and while not necessarily the better way, becomes the comfortable way; and for some, the only way. But, if we come to Jesus with open hearts, ears willing to listen, and minds prepared to adjust, revolutionary change happens.

Now, ancient Judaic law tells us that a traveler entering Palestine from another land is defiled. Any land outside of Palestine, is unclean, impure. So, we may not be welcome when we come with a message of freedom. Jesus says, "shake off the dust on your feet." We're not responsible for someone else's choices. Our responsibility is to stay focused on the mission, invite people to turn to Jesus. Should they choose not to hear the message, keep moving. Stay attentive to being healed healers and ushering in the kingdom.

As our first president, George Washington mounted many challenges. His physical presence was daunting enough. He stood just at 6'4" and about 200 pounds and was known to "not just occupy the space" he entered. Rather, one biographer writes, (Ellis p. 124), "he organized the space around it...with...his electric presence." He commanded attention with his power and authority. Benjamin Franklin, recognizing the merit of Washington's unique role, bestowed upon him a staff. Sadly, critics saw the staff as a scepter for a kingly figure rather than a staff similar to what Jesus instructed his disciples to carry. But, despite his aloofness and stiff mannerisms that contributed to his majestic image, Washington truly was a man of great virtue; always advocating for the public good; defending valiantly and courageously what was just and right to bring freedom to the American people.

A revolutionary is a person who contributes to the productivity of radical change. Revolutionaries strike out boldly and courageously for what they know is good; but, not without tension and conflict. John Adams and Alexander Hamilton were bitter enemies. Hamilton and Aaron Burr dueled over their opposing opinions. Thomas Jefferson and Adams, could not have been a more unlikely match. And, the disciples, merely, insignificant, simple fishermen, hated tax collectors, wandering ragamuffins, somehow trudge forward, with the power of God's saving grace in Jesus Christ. And grace is enough, the apostle Paul confesses in his letter to the church of Corinth. Grace is our power and authority to overcome the exhaustion of defeat, resistance and opposition, cruelty and hurt. "Power is at full strength in weakness...for it is when I am weak that I am strong," the apostle reminds us. So, like the brave founding fathers, like our devoted followers, the 12, we are called, even in our weakness to be the purveyors of radical change. We're the ones Jesus summons to make known the kingdom. So, we answer the call and go about our business; a business of power, release and freedom.

First, Jesus gives us the right. He gives us the capability to establish the kingdom. It means, we cause, kingdom living, inviting others to the radical change of kingdom living. There are lots of ways to do it. And, I would suggest we start right at home. How do we want to treat one another? What does it look like to live with the power of Jesus' love? What kind of personal change is necessary for us to invite others to repentance? Big stuff!! But, Jesus says, go for it. We are power packed healing agents for Jesus!! Second, release; we don't need a lot of stuff to be kingdom revolutionaries. Jesus says, the more junk we have cluttering up his love for us, the harder it is to grab hold and trust. We live abundant lives, abundant in the love he has for us. Finally, serving as change agents for Jesus, will absolutely grant us freedom. We are the founding fathers and mothers, sisters and brothers, sons and daughters for kingdom living. And, in the kingdom, we are liberated. We live with hope promised to us from the love of Christ, battled for us on the cross and

won, victoriously for us in the empty tomb. We're not marginal, or even peripheral in Jesus' eyes. We're his, summoned to be his people in the world, rich with love and mercy, equipped to go and be revolutionaries for his kingdom.

So, this weekend as we celebrate our nation's birthday, we give thanks for how in Jesus Christ, we are made free; free to live as Jesus, with one another and with all those in our path. Free to preach and teach kingdom nearness; free to serve as healed healers, power houses for goodness and mercy; free in our weakness to turn to Christ and know abundant strength.