

Proper 9A 2014 4th of July weekend

The 4th of July is celebrated because the Declaration of Independence was issued on that day claiming freedom for the colonial states of America from the oppression of England.

It was also a declaration of dependence upon almighty God "...who gave us life, gave us liberty at the same time". (Thomas Jefferson)

Enshrined in the document is the foundation of the American value system. We proclaim the rights of the individual to "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness". This says that every human being has value, has worth.

This is what Jesus was saying in his ministry. God has made each and everyone of us unique and of great value. Anyone who doesn't believe this and act accordingly does not really know God.

And Jesus is saying you don't have to be smart, or well-educated to know God. He says the heart, not the head is home of the gospel. Intellectual pride prevent the simplicity, the trust, the innocence of the childlike heart to know God.

What is most important is how we treat one another. What we do and how we act is what counts. When you see someone who is sad, cheer him or her up. When you see two people quarreling with one another, try to make peace between them. At the Sandwich Board we serve anyone who comes in peace. We offer food, but also friendship, conversation, and prayer as well. It doesn't take a being a big shot to help neighbors. Just the simple deeds of human love wins the approval of God. With this belief great things can happen.

That's why we try to think, act and talk in the ways that Jesus would. We Christians are convinced that in Jesus Christ we see what God is like. It is also the Christian conviction that Jesus can give that knowledge to anyone who is humble enough and trustful enough to receive it.

[St. Paul knows this isn't as easy as it sounds. In his letter to the Roman he talks about his own personal struggle to do the right thing. He says, "I don't understand my own actions. I don't do what I know is right. I do things I hate. I do wrong, instead of right." He knows that sin fights within us to control us. We need to be rescued from this. Thanks be to God Jesus Christ come to the rescue.]

Jesus spoke to all who are desperately trying to find God and desperately trying to be good. He knew we find the task of daily living exhausting. We are often weighted down beneath our burdens. At times things seem impossible and we are driven to weariness and to despair.

But listen , He says, "Come unto me all you are exhausted and carrying heavy burdens and I WILL GIVE YOU REST"

How can this be? He says, “take my yoke upon you and learn from me.” By become gentle, humble, lowly in heart, you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and makes the burden light”

Bible scholar William Barclay points out that the word *easy* can mean *fits well* according to the origins of the word. In Palestine ox-yokes were made of wood; the ox was brought, and the measurements were taken. The yoke was then roughed out, and the ox was brought back to have the yoke tried on. The yoke was carefully adjusted, so that it would fit well, and not bruise the neck of the oxen. The yoke was tailor-made to fit.

There is a legend that Jesus made the best ox-yokes in all Galilee in the years he was a carpenter in Nazareth.

People came to him to buy the best yokes that skill could make. It has been suggested that the sign over Jesus’ shop may well have been: “MY YOKES FIT WELL”

What he means is: “The life I give you is not a burden to bruise you; your task is made to measure to fit you.” Whatever God send us is made to fit our needs and out abilities exactly.

This does not mean the burden is east to carry, but it is laid on us in love; it is meant to be carried in love; and love makes even the heaviest burden light. When we remember the love of God, when we know that our burden is to love God and to love one another, we can ‘whistle while we work’ so to speak.

Yes, there are tasks and burden that fall upon us by the evil others may do, or even the stupid things we do ourselves. But, Jesus is there always to rescue us and give us the power, the guidance to overcome and endure all things for his sake. Amen.