

Sixteenth Sunday After Pentecost – Year A
September 20, 2020
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Church of the Good Shepherd, Dunedin, FL

- SERMON -

Today is Constitution Sunday. And as you know, on this day we commemorate the formation and signing of the U.S. Constitution by thirty-nine brave men on September 17, 1787. This is an important day in our nation's history.

We are pleased to have with us this morning members of the Pinellas and Pasco Counties Regents' Council of the Daughters of the American Revolution as well as the Clearwater and St. Petersburg Chapters Sons of the American Revolution to help us remember that day.

As we know, the American Revolution was a colonial revolt that took place between 1765 and 1783. The American Patriots in the Thirteen Colonies won independence from Great Britain, becoming the United States of America.

Three years before the war finally ended, these 39 men came together and began the work of designing a form of government for these United States. September 17, 1787 was their last meeting at which time they were able to put their signatures on this document setting up a government that has held our country together for 233 years.

Many of us can quote at least the first few words of the Preamble to our Constitution. I will read it to you:

“We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.”

The words of this Preamble show the concern our forefathers had for ALL human beings – the desire that ALL people be treated equally, with justice, and caring for their general welfare.

Since 1889 the National Society of the Sons of the American Revolution has been a non-profit, non-partisan organization dedicated to promoting patriotism, preserving American history and teaching American history to future generations.

Beginning one year later, in 1890, the Daughters of the American Revolution began their organization with a deeply rich history while also being truly relevant in today's world. More than 1,000,000 women have now joined the organization since it was founded over 125 years ago. They became members to honor their heritage as well as make a difference in their communities across the country AND the world.

They, like many of us, are proud of their American heritage.

In a letter to George Washington, John Hancock wrote these words:

“The American republic was founded on a set of beliefs that were tested during the Revolutionary War. Among them was the idea that all people are Created equal, whether European, Native American, or African American, and that these people have fundamental rights, such as liberty, free speech, freedom of religion, due process of law, and freedom of assembly.”

And no one can deny that many of the founding fathers of these United States of America were men of deep religious convictions based in the Bible and faith in Jesus Christ.

George Washington said, “While we are zealously performing the duties of good citizens and soldiers, we certainly ought not to be inattentive to the higher duties of religion. To the distinguished character of Patriot, it should be our highest glory to add the more distinguished character of Christian.”

Patrick Henry said, “It cannot be emphasized too strongly or too often that this great nation was founded, not by religionists, but by Christians; not on religions, but on the gospel of Jesus Christ.”

I can only imagine what it was like for these people going through this transition. They and their families sailing to a new land to start a new life. Going through a revolution to have the freedoms they felt very strong about.

In our first reading this morning, we learned that the people of Nineveh went through a change, as well. Nineveh was an ancient Assyrian city of Upper Mesopotamia. We read this morning that the people of Nineveh had turned their back on God. God sent Jonah to warn them to turn back to God. BUT Jonah didn't really want to go there and preach about God. You may recall, this is the man who took a detour and ended up in the belly of a fish. Remember that story? But now he has finally obeyed God and has proclaimed God's message to all the people of Nineveh. And what happened? The people of Nineveh believed God, they fasted, prayed and turned from their evil ways, and God forgave them. For them, that was quite a transition.

What I find interesting in this story is the reason Jonah didn't want to proclaim God's message to these people. They had been wicked, but as much as Jonah WANTED them to be punished for their wickedness, he knew if they believed God and turned from their ways, God would forgive them. Jonah himself said to God, “...for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and ready to relent from punishing.”

Abounding in steadfast love...

Definition of “Abounding”? Merriam-Webster dictionary states, “existing in or providing a great or plentiful quantity or supply.”

Other definitions – “to be rich or well supplied in” / “to be filled with”

Jonah said he knew that God is “merciful, slow to anger, and ABOUNDING (providing a great or plentiful quantity, rich and well supplied...) in steadfast love...”

And it is through that ABOUNDING love for all of humanity, that God came to our solar system, onto our beautiful planet, took on flesh, dwelled among us, and as a human being, loved us enough to make that sacrificial payment on the cross for all sin.

That is why the Apostle Paul, in our second reading this morning, encourages us to live our lives in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.

What does that mean? I believe it means to follow what Christ says IS the first and second greatest commandments, the first being to “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.” And the second is to “Love - your - neighbor - as - yourself.”

... Don’t overlook that part that says, “...as yourself.”

Have you been having a problem with that part? Loving yourself? God loves YOU! You are precious in His sight. Next time you get in front of a mirror, take a good look - and to that person looking back at you say, “I LOVE YOU! GOD LOVES YOU! GOD FORGIVES YOU! YOU ARE A CHILD OF GOD! YOU ARE BELOVED!

So, when we hear “Love your neighbor – as yourself” - as you love yourself, be sure to treat yourself AND your neighbor with love.

Throughout scripture we see examples of how to do this, including:

“Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.” (Include yourself in that, instead of tearing yourself down with words.)

- Ephesians 4:29

“Do to others as you would have them do to you.”

- Luke 6:31

Even in our country’s Declaration of Independence we find the words, “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.”

And in our Baptismal Covenant we promised to seek and serve Christ in ALL persons, loving our neighbor as ourself. And we promised to strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being.

Remember, GOD LOVES YOU! GOD FORGIVES YOU! YOU ARE A CHILD OF GOD!
YOU ARE BELOVED!

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