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Episcopal Church of the Incarnation, Santa Rosa, CA

July 7, 2024

Proper 9, Year B, Revised Common Lectionary

[2 Samuel 5:1-5, 9-10](#)

[Psalm 48](#)

[2 Corinthians 12:2-10](#)

[Mark 6:1-13](#)

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I've been thinking this Fourth of July week about home, and what it means to be from somewhere, and what it means to belong to a place, and to a people. We have two different images of belonging, and home, in our scriptures today, one for David and one for Jesus, one very triumphant and one more complicated.

In our reading from Second Samuel, King Saul has died in battle, and for several years David has been locked in a power struggle with one of Saul's sons to become king of Israel. Finally, after a series of betrayals—which the narrator takes pains to assure us David had absolutely nothing to do with—Saul's son is assassinated by two of his own generals and there's nothing left but for David to become king.

So the people come to him and say: be our king. "We are your bone and flesh," they say. "You belong to us." You were once Saul's chief general; now come be our king. And he does, and he conquers the city of Jerusalem and makes it his new capital, and he prospers.

It's a triumphant story, an uncomplicated story of belonging, at least on its face, ruler and people joined in a harmonious and flourishing relationship. Now there's maybe more complexity to it than meets the eye. Maybe David had a little more to do with Saul's son's downfall than the narrator wants us to think. And of course there's the story we're not told today of the people David had to conquer to get that city of Jerusalem. Like any national narrative, it's told in a way that highlights some stories and leaves out others. But at least from David's point of view this is a story of belonging to a place and a people that feels like an easy fit.

It's different with Jesus in the gospel reading. After an amazing course of teaching, healing, and even raising the dead, Jesus comes back to his own hometown where his teaching isn't so well received. They can't hear him as teacher or Messiah. All they see is the village carpenter. They know his mother and his siblings. They know who he is so well they can't see the deeper truth. "You belong to us," they say, almost in so many words, and in contrast to David where that's a cry of love and support and encouragement, here for Jesus it's a kind of shackle. It seems to affect even him to some extent. The people's lack of faith in him means he can't exercise his full gifts. (He can only do a paltry *few* miraculous healings, presumably because, well, he's Jesus after all.) Sometimes belonging to a place and people feels easy and sometimes it feels complicated.

I think that's something worth considering for us on this Independence Day weekend as we reflect on the life of this nation. We come to Independence Day this year against the backdrop of a country that feels in many ways like it is seriously ailing. Our electoral and political systems seem calculated to produce dysfunction and paralysis. Our voting public exists in a funhouse of parallel realities where objective facts cannot be agreed on but self-appointed experts are available on every Substack and YouTube channel. We have a level of mutual suspicion that seems to render us incapable of meaningfully tackling enormous challenges that affect us all. What does it mean to belong to this place, whether we are citizens or residents or guests here; what does it mean for us to be a part of this nation's society today, as disciples of Jesus?

I look to Jesus today whose relationship with his home place is complicated. He loves it. He loves them. They love him, or at least some of them do. And yet his calling puts him at odds with some of what it means to truly belong. I know a lot of people who have that kind of relationship with the families they grew up in. And I think of countries and societies around the world, today and all through history, where people genuinely love their home countries, the foods and smells and natural environments and customs and people, and in those places which they love they live with no expectation at all of the rule of law, with dictators who are unaccountable as a matter of course; they can go to prison for practicing the wrong religion or kissing the wrong person or backing the wrong candidate; and I realize that kind of reality is not the exception but the norm, today and all through the past.

I fear sometimes that this country might become like that. And then I think about how there have always been those who have experienced this country as like that all along, whether people of color or queer people or poor working-class people whose experience with our policing or legal or electoral systems has never been fair or equal or safe. And I think: we were never promised this would be easy. We were not promised to come into a world where institutions would function or freedom would be free. And I think: belonging to a place and to a people isn't necessarily about cheerleading or agreeing but sometimes it's about tenacious, fierce love in spite of it all, about refusing to quit, about hanging in because by God this is your place too and your people too.

And I think about those words embedded in some of this country's foundational documents: "we hold these truths to be self-evident that all people 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"; or "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances"; or "Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States"; or "No State shall deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws."

And I hear in those words something congruent with our faith, with our baptismal covenant that impels us to seek and serve Christ in all persons, to love our neighbor as ourself, to strive for justice and peace, and to respect the dignity of every human being. And I would like to keep working for this nation to live up to the ideals encoded in those documents, and not just this nation but every nation. And in the end I'm grateful that the place where we truly belong is not in any earthly nation but in the reign of God, that Jesus is Lord, not any government or president or Congress or courts, and that in Christ there is no longer any Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male or female, but one royal priesthood of every family and language and people and nation.

So this Fourth of July weekend, pray for this country. Give thanks for what is good. Ask God's grace to heal what is broken and set right what is unjust. And then do something patriotic: go out and serve the poor. Go out and protest injustice. Go out and call this country to the values it professes. Go out and make this land a better place, in the name of Jesus. And pray not only for this land but for all lands, for the coming of God's beloved reign where all will belong; all.

Announcements

- Inese with vestry update
- Generational Plan posted on website and will be available soon in print
- Welcome and thank Mark Bruce