

CHRIST THE KING LUTHERAN CHURCH

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The Sixth Sunday after Pentecost

Semi quincentennial of the United States of America

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Zechariah 9:9-12; Psalm 145:8-14; Romans 7: 15-25a; Saint Matthew 11: 16-19, 25-30

In nomine Jesu!

If I were to enter the debate about Christian values in America, there could hardly be a better time than this 250th Independence Day weekend, and hardly a better Word than Jesus' promise of appointed for us today:

Come to me, all you that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find your rest. My yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

Here is pure Gospel: Christ crucified, risen, and ascended, still calling the weary, still bearing the burden, still giving rest as gift. These words reveal Christ, and they reveal us. They summon the church to become what it receives: compassion spoken, compassion washed, compassion fed, compassion sent. And for those with ears to hear, they are echoed beneath the copper feet of Lady Liberty herself.

Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame,
With conquering limbs astride from land to land;
Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand
A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame
Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name
Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand
Glows world-wide welcome; her mild eyes command
The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame,
"Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!" cries she
With silent lips. "Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore,
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"

Many of our forebears saw her and heard a promise. Their children still come to gaze, to remember, to hope. Ellis Island is closed now, but its witness remains: welcome is not sentiment. It is vocation. It is neighbor-love. It is, for Christians, the shape of "faith active in love."

And yet while that welcome is honored as memory it is denied in practice. The harbors that once promised refuge are now watched by patrol boats and scanning skies. At other borders, men, women, and children who cross deserts and rivers for safety, bread, and breath are named as threats well before they are seen as neighbors.

On this 250th Independence Day, we are not alone in this fear. Many nations have tightened their gates. But we are among those who still speak of Christian values and of a national calling. Such must be tested at the cross. They must answer to the One who does not say, "Prove yourself," but "Come to me."

Ours is an age of wandering. The world is crowded with the uprooted: refugees, asylum seekers, families driven by war, hunger, violence, and fear. They move because they must. And we—who cherish a pilgrim story, who speak of spiritual journey, who confess with Augustine that our hearts are restless until they rest in God—we should know something of exile, longing, and home.

Zechariah speaks to such a people: tired, poor, conquered, scattered—yet called "prisoners of hope." Their king comes humble, not to crush but to free; not to glorify the sword but to speak a new word of peace to all nations. This is not thin optimism. It is Promise.

We sing that promise every Palm Sunday. We follow a humble King into the mystery of his cross and resurrection, where true freedom is given, not earned.

This is our Lutheran scandal and joy: we are justified by grace, not by worthiness; freed by Christ's love, not executive power; sent to serve our neighbor, not secure ourselves. The Prince of Peace comes crowned with thorns, enthroned on a cross, and worshiped by the weary who hear compassion in his voice:

Come to me, all you that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find your rest. My yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

That voice is still heard here today. In the Word proclaimed, Christ says, "Come." In the washing of Baptism, Christ says, "You are mine." At this table, Christ says, "Take and eat." Here the weary are welcomed, sinners forgiven, strangers made kin, and the homeless given a foretaste of home.

So, if I were to enter the debate about Christian values in America, I would begin here: at the cross, the font, the table, under the Word. I would let Christ's compassion judge my fear and free my love. I would measure every civic promise by the Gospel that has first measured me and found me in need of grace. That is what I would do on this 250th anniversary of our Nation's independence. What will you do?

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