

Newsletter Reflections for July

As we enter July, the month we traditionally celebrate Independence Day (July 4th), the date of the signing of the Declaration of Independence, this year we seem to be thinking about another type of independence. This seems to be the month that everyone wants to declare a “return to normal”. After such an abrupt break in all that was routine and accepted as what was to be expected in our lives that occurred in 2020, that is certainly a “normal” reflex action...we as human beings do like our comfort zones...those things that are our routines and “go to actions and places”...those things that are familiar to us. We like the comfort of knowing what will happen, what we will see, who we will meet. Especially as we get older, we are not inclined to seek or want changes in our world. What happened in 2020 brought about a lot of changes which we did not seek or want happened on many levels. It was painful to watch and hear the news of the illness and the many deaths which were occurring in the world; to watch as news of those who were becoming ill with this disease came closer to us; to see the death tolls rise in our nation, in our state also begin to rise to alarming numbers. These numbers began to reach ever closer to us and those we knew and thus cause changes in those things that we could do; to cause changes in the way we felt about where we could go and what it was safe for us to be able to do. Now it seems that since the danger has become less, the numbers of people who are becoming ill has decreased as shown by fewer needing hospitalizations and deaths nationwide and locally...the call to be “normal” grows loud. Yet people are still being hospitalized and dying of this disease. And the virus which causes it is still in the population and therefore still mutating which means that the vaccines which promise such hope are not a guarantee of safety. This is especially true as there are so many who for whatever reason(s) are not being vaccinated, either locally or globally...and it will take global immunity for the threat to be truly minimized. There are many things for us to reflect on as we enter into this month anticipating a Fourth of July celebration which is to celebrate more than one type of independence...the return of the Independence Day celebrations for the birth of our nation we could not have last year and the hoped for independence from the fear of the corona virus because we have reached “herd immunity” because of vaccinations. July 4th, 2021 will come. The celebrations of the anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence will happen. The reality of reaching the goal of “herd immunity” appears to be dimming. The rate at which people are getting vaccinated is slowing down...for many reasons; just as the rate at which unvaccinated people are disregarding the precautions needed to slow the spread of the virus are rapidly increasing. This urge to return to “normal” seems to be the compelling force. However, perhaps the events of this past year should cause us to reflect on some of these things in a deeper sense about what they have revealed about our commitments to what we say we believe; about how what we say and what we do really match. Are those things which we want to “return to”, those things which are “normal” for us, really good witnesses for those things we say we believe about who and what we are? Whether on the Fourth of July we want

to celebrate either as citizens of a country founded on a concept of equality and a government for the “common good” or come to worship on that Sunday morning, July 4th to worship and witness to God who calls us to work for a kingdom to come to earth where the values proclaimed by Jesus of Nazareth are witnessed to by word and deed, these are questions which are before us this year. The events of 2020 were stark in the revelations of the differences in what is “normal” for different people in this country. The teachings we find in scriptures are pretty clear about what those who answer the call of Jesus are called to be and do...who is to be the One whom they follow and give their allegiance. Do we really care about others? When we look at others do we (can we) see the image (face) of our Lord in them...in all of them? The way the covid-19 spread revealed much about us...about where the “fault-lines” of our caring really are. Those who were most affected were the ones least able to protect themselves, the ones with the fewest options to stay at home or work from home. The way the urge to protect “self” over “other” was revealed was clear; just as the way the “return to normal” seems to be prioritizing “self-interests” over “common good”. Just as the signing of that Declaration did not actually gain independence for the colonies or create the nation, this July 4th will not mean the end of this virus or the harm that it causes. As we move through the summer and hopefully are able to free ourselves of the harm the covid-19 virus has caused, may we also work on those other viruses which infect us by seeking to more closely develop a new normal based on the teachings of our Lord and leaving behind the harmful infection of self-centeredness and take up the vaccination of caring for others he proclaimed.

Shalom,

Pastor Libby