

Liberty and Justice for All

by the Rev. Karen Sullivan

It is the Independence Day weekend. This is a time when even the most cynical and dissatisfied among us become somewhat patriotic and wave the red, white, and blue. I consider myself and my family pretty patriotic. An American flag has flown in front of our home since Sean and I were married. We decorate in Americana, we love patriotic music, fireworks, and celebrations of national pride. One of our sons served in the United States Army and another in the Navy. We love our country and the ideals for which it stands. One nation, under God, with liberty and justice for all.

I have to tell you, though, that for all that national pride, I do not see this nation through rose colored glasses. I love the ideas that founded our country but I know those ideas are not realized for a good many people. The founders of the United States were businessmen, part of the establishment, those seeking to be free to make not just a living but a profit, without being tethered to the taxation and laws of England. When Thomas Jefferson said all men are created equal, he meant only certain "men," business- and landowners. He did not mean slaves, indentured servants, renters, women, or children. I get that.

As our nation has matured, we have come a lot closer to liberty and justice for all. Slavery is illegal, women can vote and own property. The civil rights movement has made life better for minorities. Anyone can marry the person they love regardless of gender, education is free to anyone who wants it, and legally anyone can buy or rent property where they want, regardless of race, ethnicity or creed. But I would be a fool to say all this freedom is universal and all of it is realized. We have a lot of work to do.

Classism, racism, and injustice thrive in our communities. The poverty rate in the United States is higher than in many other industrialized nations, especially among children and the elderly. Funds are cut for social assistance on a regular basis while Congress gives itself a raise. Crime rates rise as poverty rises.

Americans tend to use the Bible to justify social norms. Today's epistle is one of those used often. Taken out of context, Paul's words – “you reap what you sow” and “carry your own burden” – have become sacred mantras to capitalists, especially those who do not support social programs such as food stamps, aid to women and children, housing assistance, and even Social Security and Medicare. Somehow they have lost sight of the Paul's reminder that we also share each other's burdens and the harvest is for the kingdom of God . . . all of it.

When I listen to people talk about all the injustice and lack of true freedom in our nation, I often hear also that they feel helpless to do anything about it. It seems that if one does not have a lot of financial resources, one will not be heard.

But take heart. Pay attention to the Gospel.

Jesus sent his followers out in pairs, no one stands alone. We are heard better in numbers, but not necessarily big numbers. He sent them with nothing, no extra clothes, no purse, no food. He sent His disciples as lambs into wolves, without any means and yet they were heard!

Jesus knew not everyone would get it, not everyone would pay attention. He told them to leave those places and shake the dust of those places from their feet. But He also told them to keep moving, to keep trying, to find those who would listen. In those places where their Good News was received and heard, good things happened.

We don't need a lot of money to be heard. We don't need a lot of stuff in our travels to make positive change. We need to stand together, keep moving, and never to give up. I urge all of us to remember this.

Next year when the legislature meets, let us go as a group to speak to justice that is not always just, to those things that need to change: gun laws that actually make us safer, education and childcare that actually help our children, and programs that actually aid the poorest in our community.

We don't have to wait for bigger groups, those with money to get us started; remember, even two people with no purse or supplies can be heard and make change. We can start organizing ourselves and those around us to speak to people in positions of power, to strive to be heard for the good of others. We can once again be leaders in our diocese and our community for social justice.

To do so is following the example of Jesus. To do so is to model those who founded this parish, more than 100 years ago. To do so is Christian. To do so is American.

Let us be determined.

Let us go forward in faith.

Together, let us work as one congregation, under God, to bring liberty and justice for all.