

A homily preached by the Revd RL Ficks III at Church of the Good Shepherd, Houlton, Maine on the Fourth Sunday after Pentecost (7/7), 2019

Isaiah 66:10-14; Galatians 6:1-16; Luke 10:1-11; 16-20

“The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.”

243 years ago this last Thursday, what I take to be the pivotal event in the history of the modern world took place. A group of individuals at Philadelphia penned words that altered the course of history to this present day, and, chief amongst those words, I believe, were those which stated “. . .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.”

An astounding assertion. . .that a nation is made up of individuals who are all created equal. Each one of them.

It is an assertion that our nation has made real sometimes better and sometimes worse. . .and when we have done it at its best, we have been at our best.

The notion had been put forth many centuries previously when we were adjured to “love our neighbor as ourself.”

Simply put, both statements remind us. . .call us to. . .always remembering that none of us is better than anyone else. . .none of us is to have special treatment. . .none of us is above the work of seeing that liberty and justice are freely available to every single individual who is willing to seek them and to accept the responsibilities entailed in receiving such astonishing gifts.

It strikes me that on this 4th of July weekend, in fact, on all days, each of us is called to reflect on what we are doing. . .how we are laboring. . .to insure that this central tenet of our nation and our faith is being realized as fully as it is possible for us to do.

Yes, it is clear that none of us may be in a position to have a particularly profound effect on grand national policies, but it has always been a central belief in our Faith that what we do in the smaller arenas of life. . .in our communities, our neighborhoods, and our own families. . .has, in its own small manner, a significant effect on a larger whole.

Are there individuals upon whom we look down? Are there men and women we think of as less worthy than ourselves? Are there those we exclude from gifts which we enjoy? Are there members of our families from whom we have cut ourselves off because we do not like them or accept the who and what of the people they are or the lives they live? Are there neighbors of whom we think less because they annoy us or behave in manners we think are wrong-headed?

Each of us has to answer such questions for ourselves, but, if the answer to any of those questions is “Yes,” then, I wonder, if we might not be well-advised also to ask ourselves precisely what it is we are doing to make matters better...to see that a more equal world is being created even in the small worlds which we each inhabit and which are our lives. Are we willing to labor in order to do what we are able to see that the harvest of liberty is, indeed, as plentiful as Jesus suggests that God would want it to be...as plentiful as the founders of this nation suggested that it ought to be? Do we really believe that, in Paul’s words to the Galatians, we are to, “...bear one another’s burdens?”

If the answer is “Yes,” well that is all well and good. I, for one, find that I would come up more than a bit short, and, if the same is true for you, I wonder how we might each labor more fully to change things.

You see, these questions in particular...and this issue in general...might seem only to be matters of secular national politics and policy, but, for those who would call themselves Christian...they have more to do with our spiritual lives and our very souls than with something happening far away and about which we think we can do very little...have more to do with the promise we made when we were baptized to “respect the dignity of every human being.”

To pray, as we did in this morning’s Collect, that “...we may be devoted to (God) with our whole heart, and united to one another with pure affection...” presumes that God’s kingdom and the kingdom of the world are, in some manner, one with another. The “united to one another” for which we pray is not just about those we like...or are friendly with...or are unthreatened by...or can relate to because they look and act like us...is not simply about those individuals but about every single human being that makes this journey with us.

None of this is easy. It demands incredible work...and trust in God, but it cannot be accomplished by someone else...somewhere off in a place we don’t spend our time.

There is a harvest...a harvest so overwhelming we can but imagine it...but those who must labor to bring it to fruition are you and I...and, perhaps, on this weekend of the day of all days, we are wise to reflect on that and be certain we are showing the children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren of this parish and this town how very much work such a harvest requires...in order that, as Abraham Lincoln noted many years after July 4th, 1776 at a battlefield on which thousands had labored and paid the ultimate sacrifice, “...that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom -- and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.”