

From the Pulpit

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“A Declaration of Interdependence!”

***Psalm 45: 10-17; Genesis 24:34-38,
42-49, 58-67, Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30***

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By The Rev. Timothy C. Ahrens

Senior Minister

A Communion Meditation delivered by The Rev. Timothy C. Ahrens, Sr. Minister, The First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, Columbus, Ohio, Pentecost 4, July 6, 2014 dedicated to the birth of Charles Hayler, son of Elizabeth Hire and Chris Hayler on June 22, 2014, to Thomas Jefferson and the patriots who joined in signing the Declaration of Independence, July 4, 1776 and always to the glory of God!

“A Declaration of Interdependence!”

***Psalms 45: 10-17; Genesis 24:34-38, 42-49, 58-67,
Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30***

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Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of each one of hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our salvation. Amen.

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From the autumn of 1775 through the Spring of 1776, Thomas Jefferson experienced the dark night of the soul. In September, 1775, Thomas and Martha Jefferson lost their 18 month old daughter, Jane Randolph Jefferson – the first of four children he would bury in infancy – not including Martha’s multiple miscarriages. In the midst of grieving Jane’s death, he was called away on political business. While away, mail was not reaching him. In his own words, he became deeply distressed and depressed. Late in the winter of 1776, Martha

miscarried her pregnancy. Then on March 31, 1776, Jefferson's mother passed away following a severe stroke. For the next five weeks, he suffered severe migraines and was bed-ridden.

In early May, 1776 Thomas Jefferson crawled out of bed and travelled through intense heat to Philadelphia. While Virginia was drafting and approving their declaration of rights and the first ever state constitution – a document Jefferson was actually drafting from his room on the corner of 7th and Market Sts., heat and horseflies were afflicting the Second Continental Congress.

In the midst recovering from depression, heat and horseflies Thomas Jefferson wrote two world changing documents.

One thing was clear in both the Virginia constitution and the Declaration of Independence – A Deity had found favor in this Virginian's pen. But this was also clear. The God of these historic documents was not the God of Abraham or Jesus. This was a more rational God. This was "Nature's God" a "God of Divine Providence." Along with his colleagues, Jefferson agreed that a King and a God would never be united in the United States of America. There would never again be a State Church on the shores of America.

He wrote, "All persons shall have full and free religious opinion; nor shall any be compelled to frequent or maintain any religious institution." As he turned his pen from philosophy to declaration, he continued:

*“When in the Course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which **the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God** entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.*

*We hold these truths to be self-evident, 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...*

*... (the Declaration of Independence closes with these words)...And for the support of this Declaration, with a **firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence**, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor.*

For Jefferson it was clear (as it should be for us as well). This was not the God of the Bible -this Creator, this Nature's God, and this Divine Providence. Moreover, as he was to write later, our nation was not to be superior in any way over and against any other nation. He was not proclaiming America as exalted among nations. He saw us as “separate and equal” among the family of nations. Jefferson's God did not favor this nation over any nation.

The God of the Declaration was a divine force that created the Universe, endowed all men and women with human rights, and was an active presence in the world that God made. (quoted in Jon Meacham's, American Gospel, Random House, NY, NY, 2006, pp.70-75).

How did we get from this foundational understanding of the separation of Church and Government and a belief that all men and women are created equal to a Roberts' Supreme Court decision against women and in support of 90% of American corporations – based on religious beliefs? May I remind you and Mr. Roberts and his court – all corporations are soulless. All women are soulful. This inherent separation between women's rights and corporate rights is obvious – isn't it?

Denying women workers means to preventative health care – including contraception – is anti-woman and unjust in every imaginable way. Both Pro-Life and Pro-Choice advocates have already spoken out against the Robert's Court Decision. I don't know about you, but I have a major problem with allowing corporate CEO's the power to override public policy based on their personal religious beliefs.

What would Jefferson say? What would Jesus say?

On this Independence Day Weekend, I would like us to take some time to consider our Founding Father's appeal

to a Divine Providence and our place as one among all the nations. While we are proud to be Americans, we must also take our prideful place in the global community as one nation – sharing and using the limited resources of this globe – with all the other nations.

We should never believe ours are exalted or divine rights in a global community. Instead, we should take our place and contribute economically, intellectually, and spirituality in the give and take of all God's children in all the corners of God's world. What can we learn from the other 195 nations of this world? What can we teach the others, as well?

Perhaps it is time for a new declaration – this one a declaration of interdependence. How might we share and grow in mutuality with our global partners? How might we learn from them how better to care for the earth and all the earth's inhabitants? How might our song of peace be a song for all the nations? Some – like Ann Coulter and other conservative pundits – see such words and potentially such action as a sign of weakness. I see it as a sign of strength. When the Apostle Paul declared that the first should be last, he wasn't talking about the World Cup. He was talking about humility and faith and walking with God in this world. On our Independence Day weekend, I hope and pray we find a way to embrace Jefferson's vision of our place

among all the nations. I hope and pray we will craft a declaration of interdependence so that we and our children and our children's children will have the chance to live and breathe free – and that the children of our neighbors across the globe will have the same rights and freedoms upon the same planet which they call home, too.

With this spirit in mind, our country would leave a positive, indelible legacy in our global community – one which would make Jefferson and all the founding fathers proud. Amen.

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