

“The Pulse of the People”

14th Sunday in Ordinary Time

II Kings 5:1-14; Galatians 6:7-16;

Luke 10:1-11, 16-20

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From the Pulpit

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A communion meditation delivered by The Rev. Dr. Timothy C. Ahrens, Sr. Minister, The First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, Columbus, Ohio, July 3, 2016, The 14th Sunday in Ordinary time and Proper 9, dedicated to Elie Wiesel, Nobel Peace Prize winner, American citizen, global citizen and Holocaust survivor who died at 87 years old and to all freedom fighters through our 240 years of independence as a nation and always to the glory of God!

“The Pulse of the People”

II Kings 5:1`-14; Galatians 6:7-16; Luke 10:1-11, 16-20

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

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“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 (people) 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...”

With these opening words, on July 2, 1776, 56 men from 13 “states” unanimously agreed to declare independence from the King of England. With this declaration we would no longer be known as colonies but as the United States of America. 240 years ago, on July 4 they signed this declaration and set our fledgling nation on the path of independence.

The 1458 words in the declaration of independence were bold and daring. (Sadly there had been another 35 words – which when stricken – left African-Americans enslaved and created further racial divisions over which we still struggle). Seven years later, with the formal end of war for independence, these words would define the heart and soul of the newly created body known as the United States of America. These

words are now forever enshrined in the National Archives in Washington, DC – a building which was constructed by John Russell Pope – the same man who built this magnificent cathedral of grace.

240 years have passed since that hot day in Philadelphia when the Declaration was signed and read and the liberty bell rang – “**Freedom.**” That day, the pulse of the people was **freedom**. That pulse should be the same today. When we feel the pulse of freedom, we know it. It is a pulse which pounds out love and justice.

This weekend, hundreds of millions of Americans have been gathering with family, friends, and neighbors to celebrate Independence Day. But the July 4 weekend has long been about more than just barbeques and fireworks. It is also a **chance for Americans to reflect on the nation’s fundamental values and celebrate fundamental American freedoms, including what many call our first freedom: **religious liberty**.**

This year, our Independence Day coincides with the end of Ramadan (tomorrow night at sunset) — the Islamic holy month when Muslims worldwide fast from dawn to sunset. However, Ramadan includes more than just abstaining from food and drink. During this month, Muslims strive to come closer to God by performing charitable acts, mending broken relationships, and building character while practicing self-

discipline. Ramadan can be a challenging month for Muslims to observe, not only because of the long, hot days of fasting but also because of the constant scrutiny, discrimination, dangerous speech and hate crimes that they face today from bigoted individuals in the media, politics, and the general public.

These daily aggressions offer a stark reminder that religious liberty is not a reality for all in the nation. There are even politicians who proclaim that certain religions – Islam first and foremost – should not even be granted the same religious freedom and tolerance that other religions – like Christianity – should be granted. Such erosion of religious freedom stands in stark contrast to the measures and meaning of freedom established so long ago in the Declaration of Independence and solidified in law through the Constitution. This current pulse is not the pulse of freedom. This is the pulse of perversity and shame. It is a pulse which follows the beat of fear not faith.

The pulse of religious liberty is not the only one being challenged today. We also see the pulse of civility, inclusion, tolerance, racial and economic equality and true democratic representation being challenged. When big money buys **politicians and elections, the people's pulse is lost altogether.** When Congressional districts are gerrymandered in such ways

that lines are drawn to ghettoize people by privileged and under-privileged districts, democracy is not served and neither are all the people of our nation. **Freedom's beat is lost in the** cadence of greed and separation. When such a pulse becomes the heartbeat of America, people need to rise in the midst of these challenges to declare who we are and what we believe.

In today's gospel, Jesus knew he was facing the pulse of hard times. He knew that his path was not an easy one. He knew that his change of direction from teaching, preaching and healing in rural Israel to witnessing to his faith in the urban center of Jerusalem would mean a change in tactics and training for his disciples.

He sent them out ahead of him, two by two. They went door-to-door through the villages and countryside of Galilee and into the cities as well. They were given clear instructions – seek out those who are willing to work for God. Travel light. Be on guard. Bring peace to each household. Where you are **welcomed, that's good news**. Where you are not welcomed, shake the dust off and move on.

We would do well to travel the roadways of our current day with such clear instructions. First Church needs people who will step up and step out and do something good for God. We need to do our work in the church – shoulder to shoulder – side by side. We also need to go out and serve together. This

isn't always the case. Too often appeals of staff and lay leaders fall on ears that are not hearing or listening. All of us need to be engaged in the work we do for Christ. Christian faith is not a spectator sport. We all need to stand up, be counted, respond when called upon, serve, offer to serve, give generously of our time, our talents and our treasures. We can do our work shoulder-to-shoulder, side-by-side; two-by-two. Always together.

We often hear in the scriptures about the 12 disciples. But, in this passage Jesus had added another 58 people to the mission. Translation for our time – it is not only the handful of “chosen ones” or “elected leaders” who must do the work before us – virtually alone. We are all in this together. So, be counted. In fact, call us before we call you. Then, when we call – answer.

We read further that people responded really well to the 70. They came back to Jesus reporting that the Spirit with which he sent them – a spirit that drew people in and drove evil out – was alive and well in the land.

Good news multiples. Again, there is a lesson in this for us. When we have good news to share, when we have a blessing to give, when we have the pulse of freedom in our speech and in our lives, when we bring good news to people – hope is born and people are lifted up. That is REALLY GOOD NEWS!

Let us be part of the pulse of the people that lives and breathes freedom – freedom of speech, freedom of religious liberty, freedom from oppression and greed and tyranny and terror. Let us be the people with a pulse for justice.

In her new song “Pulse,” written within 24 hours of the terror in the Pulse Night Club of Orlando, Melissa Etheridge cries out:

*Everybody's got a pain inside
Imaginary wounds they fight to hide
How can I hate them
When everybody's got a pulse*

*I dream in a world that wants my soul
That tells me if I hate I can control
But I don't believe it
I cannot conceive it
Because everybody's got a pulse*

*I am human, I am love
And my heart beats with my blood
Love will always win
Underneath the skin
Everybody's got a pulse*

What is our pulse? Let us feel the heartbeat of our faith and our nation this morning. **Everybody's got a pulse.** Let our hearts beat for faith and justice and freedom – now and always. Amen.

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