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Calvary Episcopal Church / Kaneohe, Hawaii

5<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost, Proper 9A: 5 July 2020

Genesis 24:34-38, 42-49, 58-67 / Psalm 45: 11-18 / Romans 7:15-25a / Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30

Good morning... to all of you here in person, and to all gathered from near and far, online. And a Happy July 4<sup>th</sup> weekend to one and all. It is quite a different kind of July 4<sup>th</sup> this year, isn't it...

Now, this July 4<sup>th</sup> I did something I often do before preaching a Sunday sermon, looking and thinking back over past Sundays of the church year and what I might have preached on the last time this set of readings came up, or even the last time it was this time of the year. And do you know what? I haven't preached on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July weekend since 2007 – 13 years ago. We are usually on vacation with our families at this point in the summer, in Minnesota or Wisconsin. So there you have it. Everyone is experiencing this day, and this year, differently than they ordinarily would.

Now today, our scriptures pick up the story of Abraham and his family from Genesis once again, this time relating the story of Abraham's servant going to get a wife for his son Isaac. Before he turns in for the night, the servant makes a kind of prayer to God. He essentially asks God for a very specific sign that the woman he is to present to Isaac will offer him, *and his camels*, a drink. And so it happens. Not only does the plan work, but the woman, Rebekah, comes with him readily and immediately, and in fact does become Isaac's wife. Match.com for the ancient world – worked like a charm.

Make of this story what you will... but I think if there's anything it has to say to us today it's that these characters – Abraham and his servant, Isaac, Rebekah, Rebekah's brother Laban father Bethuel (willing to give her up) – are all *highly dependent* on the motives and actions of others. They expect the others in the story to behave a certain way, and for the most part, they do. And in a way, that's perhaps what's kind of touching about the whole thing, regardless of what you might think of the idea of "going to fetch a wife" or Rebekah's own decision making (or lack of it) in the whole process. For the whole thing to work, each of them is dependent on the expected actions of the others. It all falls apart if they don't, and it would make God look bad.

This Independence Day, I wonder whether we may have lost some of that. I wonder if we may have lost some of the recognition that, in this country and in our lives, we truly need one another. We are, in fact, much more *dependent* on each other than we sometimes want to admit.

There are good reasons for this, I suppose. Maybe we have some of the spirit of some of the early settlers of this country (or these Islands), who had no choice but to forge ahead without much aid from elsewhere. They had independent spirits, for sure, but within a local tribe or village or even in the stories of the forebears of this country, I venture to say there was, in general, an understanding of serving something greater – the colony or territory or new

republic or family that was being made. Individual good for the larger whole, the larger family, the society at large.

So I think this is a similar kind of thing that Jesus often speaks about to the crowds or with his disciples. Today is no exception. He said to the crowd,

“I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants... and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.”

In other words, to those who expected to receive position or status or special treatment because of that status, God has done the unexpected. He has revealed himself to whom the Son chooses. God has brought into an inter-dependent family those who might have been otherwise left out. And the only thing that’s needed, really, is to come to him – to be drawn to him, and to give up on “pulling yourself up by your own might”.

This means, of course, in the family of God. But I think it has some profound implications for this country too. What would it mean if, instead of trying so hard to make it on our own, we became the ones who sounded the call of the need to work together? What would it mean if we gave those around us the courage, and the space, to be vulnerable to one another in their needs and concerns, their challenges in this country, this place, and in this time? And ultimately, of course, to point to the Lord who invites all of us mismatched, unprepared, and unworthy servants to his family and banquet.

We might be able to see a very different sort of Independence Day, both for our families, our churches, and for this country as a whole.

Dependent on one another and upon the larger family that calls itself children of one Father, let that ring in your hearts and minds this Independence Day weekend. Let the freedom to “Come to me, all who are weary and carrying heavy burdens” be the invitation, rather than a rallying cry. The One who calls us to depend on one another and upon him, reminds us that he is “gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls”. May the soul of this nation also find rest – and peace – and inter-dependence on our Creator and Redeemer, and in his family in which we stand. Amen.