

Interdependence Day (Sermon)
Sermon (FCC)
July 3, 2016

Greetings

Good Morning. **Once again** thank you to Pastor Chuck Blaisdell, and the family here at First Christian Church for the opportunity to present this sermon.

Also and as always, thank you to my wife, son, father, family and friends who have traveled to Colorado Spring on this Sunday morning.

Introduction

For myself, July 4th is one of the seven most important dates on my calendar, and arguably my most life altering date. Oh, how I so love and cherish the 4th of July, with all of the associated celebration, pomp and circumstance. **Every year** I celebrate the date with lots of fanfare, and a barbeque second to none. That is how passionate I am about honoring this single life-altering date on the calendar. **Why** you might ask is it that I feel this way? Is it because I spent 22 years serving in the United States military? Or, is it because I am so thankful to be a citizen of this great nation?

Jasmine's Birthday and Dependent to Interdependence

I'll give you the answer to the primary reason behind my over exuberance. You see on July 4th 1989, Shari and I's daughter Jasmine was born. **Yes my** oldest child was born on the 4th of July, and for every year of these first twenty seven years of her life, she has given notice to her mother and I, that the most important reason to celebrate the 4th of July, is because it is her birthday. **As She** sees it, her birthday always comes first, and is never second, to anything. **Therefore** the barbeques and fireworks are all about her. As her very proud father, I am going to have to take her side and agree with her assessment of the day.

On July 4, 1989, I was in the Air Force, stationed in Enid Oklahoma. For those who are familiar with the military, the term given to a family member, of the service member, is "dependent". **Although** Shari was considered a "dependent" of mine, the term took on a new meaning with our daughter. Immediately upon her birth we became acutely aware that we would have a daughter who would be solely dependent upon us for her very existence. **We were** so much so aware of this that during the nine months before her dramatic arrival on the scene, we began to prepare for this dependent. We read books, magazines, took classes, and visited every infant or baby themed store we could find. **Our goal** was to do everything perfectly, from making sure she had the best baby food to eat, to ensuring that her car seat was the safest on the market. If the lack of funds in our bank account during that period is any indication of how well we did, then I would say we were completely successful in our mission, as soon to be new parents.

I am sure you are at this point asking; "what exactly does your dependent daughter have to do with your sermon title of interdependence?" **Well,** what we came to realize in short order as being true, is that although our daughter was dependent upon us for her very being and safety, we were also just as dependent upon her, and thus from the very beginning we recognized that our family could only be healthy, through our interdependence upon one another.

Let me break this down a bit further so that you might better recognize what interdependence looks like in your lives. Arguably for those who are parents or have in some capacity acted as a parent, you perhaps would agree that your emotional health has been dependent upon the well being of your children. **If you have** ever had a child stay out past curfew, perhaps get involved with a group of people you were not particularly fond of, or even get into trouble, no matter how large or small, you have been in a situation where you were dependent upon your dependent for your emotional stability. **For a parent** the most stressful time of their life is known to be the day they depart a college campus leaving their child behind. With nerves frazzled, a parent's psychological well-being is dependent upon the types of decisions their child will make during those next four, five or six years. And, in reality for the remainder of the parents life.

Scripture

Now lets take a look at how this example of our children is applicable to us in our contemporary Christian lives, and at just what a collective interdependence really means as we interact with one another.

(Exodus 17:8-13)

First of all interdependence is biblical. The Exodus Story of the Israelites, shares with us the account of Joshua defeating the Amalekite army. As read in scripture, Israel was dependent upon Moses as their leader, for deliverance to the Promised Land. **However**, even in all of Moses' skill and strength he could not do it alone, and indeed, he was just as dependent upon those around him as they were upon him. **Scripture tells us** that as long as Moses with his staff, had his hands held up, the Israelites were winning the battle and whenever he lowered his hands, the Amalekites were winning. **Now his fellow** Israelites and companions, Aaron and Hur could have ran in the opposite direction in fear, seeing how weak at least in appearance that Moses was, and could have believed that perhaps they would be better off out on their own, attempting to survive as individuals. **Instead** they realized that the very survival of not only themselves but of Israel itself, was one in which they would have to be dependent upon one another and thus become interdependent. **So when Moses** grew tired, Aaron and Hur provided a stone for Moses to sit upon and on one side Aaron held up one of Moses' hands and on the other Hur did the same. Consequently Joshua would overcome the Amalekite army.

(Romans 12:3-8)

In the New Testament we are provided ample examples of interdependence and central to the Gospel Message, is that everyone is important and that everyone matters. **In Romans 12** the apostle Paul instructs us that each of us within the body of Christ while having different functions, are all needed in order for the body of Christ to live. We thus form one body belonging to one another and thus again are interdependent. It is right there in our holy scriptures.

(1 Corinthians 12:12-27)

And again to reiterate Paul makes clear in the versus of 1 Corinthians 12 where he states: "we are all baptized with one Spirit so as to form one body – weather Jews or Gentiles, slave or free – and we are all given the one Spirit to drink. Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many." – "Not of one part but of many."

Now with all that I have presented we have to ask the honest questions and face the sometimes difficult to stomach answers, of how is this interdependence relevant to me, and those around me today, as we begin to live out a contemporary twenty-first century Christianity?

God's children are indispensable

God did not make any mistakes and often our mistake is that we believe we know more about the creation than does the creator of all that exist, both seen and unseen. **If we** are to survive in this twenty first century and beyond, as a nation and a people, which includes those of us who make claim to, and identify with the Christian faith, then we must take to heart and believe that everyone regardless of if they are poor or homeless. **Regardless** of their race, ethnicity, sexual orientation or gender. Regardless of their economic status, immigration status or faith traditions, are all indispensable to the community and thus we are interdependent upon one another.

Ubuntu

I believe everyone is aware, Shari and I took a trip to South Africa in March, celebrating our thirtieth wedding anniversary. One of my personal highlights of the trip came during our stay in Johannesburg, when we visited the township of Soweto. **The travel** agency informed us that some of the images of abject poverty could be quite disturbing and that we should be prepared. Having traveled the world for thirty years, I was not too concerned, in that I had seen such poverty in places like India and the Philippines.

What surprised me though, was that when we entered Soweto there were homes rivaling and I am sure in some cases superior to, any in the United States. Soweto was peppered with homes boasting both swimming pools and immaculate lawns. **Yet literally** in some cases, well less than a stone's throw and across the street, there were the shanty homes without plumbing or electricity that we are all accustomed to seeing in the media. I asked our driver and guide what exactly was going on. **He advised** us that in post Apartheid South Africa, community was the most important factor in the survival of its people and the nation as a whole. So on many occasions some of those Black South Africans who had financial means or a bit of education chose to stay or return to the townships in order to stay united and strengthen their community. **By the way** there were no real physical fences or walls separating and keeping out, anyone.

Now South Africa certainly has its issues as almost every nation does, so I am not trying to paint a picture through rose-colored glasses that is not realistic and accurate. But I am making the point that the biblical principal of interdependence is alive in the twenty first century, and it is being lived out.

There is an African term that I imagine many of you are familiar with and it is called ~~Ubuntu~~ **(oo-BOON-too)**. ~~Ubuntu~~ **(oo-BOON-too)** is an African concept of personhood in which the identity of the self is understood to be formed interdependently through

community”.¹ **I will repeat:** “Ubuntu (**oo-BOON-too**) is an African concept of personhood in which the identity of the self is understood to be formed interdependently through community”. **Simply stated** “I in you and you in me” or as South African Archbishop Desmond Tutu so eloquently articulates: “My humanity is bound up in yours and we can only be human together”.

Puzzle

Now I want you to each take out the puzzle piece you collected when you came into the sanctuary this morning. That single puzzle piece in your hand probably doesn’t really mean a whole lot, because it is singular and stands alone. **However**, I am sure that many of you have already figured out, to what puzzle your individual piece belongs.

Yes it is Our American Flag. If you look closely you will see that it is raggedy and incomplete, nothing that you would ever hang on your wall or present to anyone. **Yet in your hand** and as a representation of yourself, you are holding the piece on which all the other pieces are dependent, therefore completing the flag and thus rendering us all interdependent upon one another.

Since not everyone can see the puzzle, I will place it in the back of the sanctuary after service so that everyone might see the impact of the imagery and the importance of all the individual pieces to the whole. I’ll also ask you to please return your puzzle piece to the receptacle in order for the puzzle to be healthy, whole and complete.

Rethinking “independence” and “interdependence”

I began this sermon speaking of my daughters’ birth and how we went from having a dependent to quickly realizing we had in reality through our dependence upon one another, become interdependent. **In our** nuclear family, the puzzle in 1991, came to include our son Dominique and therefore, each of the four of us exist, within a realm of interdependence.

Quite critically, in our twenty-first century Christianity, “interdependence or “Ubuntu (**oo-BOON-too**),” is the medium by which we all feel and share not only in the joys of life, but also in life’s anguish. **Painful** examples are found in the killing of congregates of an African American Baptist Church in South Carolina. **The slaughter** of school children in Newtown Connecticut, or college students in Roseburg Oregon. **The execution** of patrons of an LGBTQ nightclub in Orlando. **A young** girl or woman, or even boys being shuffled off into the nightmare of enslavement associated with human sex trafficking. **The pain** and anguish still alive in many of those who are descendants of a people displaced over hundreds of years from the African continent and initially defined as only three-fifths human. **A marginalized** and maligned community of indigenous people’s, whose sovereign nations are for the most part rendered invisible and relegated to the shadows of arguments over whether it is appropriate to identify mascots and athletic teams with references and names deemed to be racially insensitive at best. **Or, families** being split up and threatened deportation from a nation that espouses to be the land of the free and home of the brave, with liberty and justice for all. And, at the falling short of the promises of the magnificent words of our Declaration of Independence adopted on July 4, 1776 which simply states: **“We hold** these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that

¹ Michael Battle, *“Ubuntu: I in You and You in Me”*, Seabury Books, New York. 2009 loc. 22.

they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness”.

Final Words

You see, Moses, Aaron, Hur, the Apostle Paul and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, all exemplified and issued the call and requirement for us to live dependently upon one another, thus becoming interdependent.

So tomorrow on July 4th, let the challenge, as we “rightfully celebrate” our nations Independence Day, be for each one of us to take an introspective look at ourselves, and choose to submit to living out a biblically modeled interdependence.