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Many years ago on the fourth of July my parents and some of their friends, my brothers and our wives.... or were they girlfriends then? We gathered at our beach place on St. Andrew's Bay in Panama City. It had been a hot day. The sun had turned rose colored just before it stove nightward into the horizon. We were all about to walk down to the dock from which we could watch the fireworks being set off on the city docks a couple of miles away. Hundreds of boats were headed out into the bay, their bow lights winking like fireflies in the gathering dark to get an even closer view.

There was a problem however. Some of the people from around the neighborhood had walked out on our dock with coolers and chairs....dug in for the show. I got elected by the household to ask diplomatically the people to leave, since, after all, it was our dock....but as I slowly walked through the front yard, down to the water, I began wondering just how far out into the bay our property actually went. I remembered it might have something to do with the tide...I was not a very well prepared diplomat... and the closer I got to the end of the dock, the more I began to lose heart.

I found who seemed like the patriarch of this clan and mustered my courage. Sir, I said, we certainly don't mind y'all walking out on the dock,

but we're having a party and we'd like for us to sit out here on the end...He looked at me straight in the eye said, "son I've been coming to this dock for fifty years"...I was thinking he was going to invoke the doctrine of adverse possession, but instead he said, "this dock belongs to all who would come to it. Those boundaries on your father's deed don't mean nothing", he said...just look at that water...show me a boundary... He was right. I had no argument. I had failed in my diplomatic mission...but they made room for us (on our dock) and it was Okay to share this glistening corner of creation, the North Star in its rightful place, poignant and stoic; Orion wheeling westward, keeping vigil.... The lights of the fishing village of St Andrews danced on the shimmering surface of the bay, an incandescent code there for the interpreting.....and then there were fireworks blossoming in the gaudy night.... Celebrating this land that our forebears claimed as their own some two hundred years ago.

Who of you have read the Declaration of Independence? The preamble is what's most familiar to us... "that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights: life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness...'that governance in this land gets its authority from the governed; that the rights of the individual are sacred....This is of course not original to the founding fathers....they got this

language from the imaginations of John Locke, Adam Smith and Voltaire...this language was in the rarefied air of the Enlightenment... and these philosophers also... borrowing ideas from the tenets of classical liberalism, of Plato and Aristotle, addressing the immemorial question of how then shall we live together justly and with dignity...A question that should forever be on our lips....if we are true patriots.

But there's more to the Declaration of Independence. To be sure it puts forth an egalitarian vision, but there's more that we don't hear much about. It also bids us watch out....watch out for the tyrant and the despot lying in wait, those who would subvert this collaborative and mutual sharing of power for self-interested purposes. The powerful after all have a sordid history over the procession of the empires of the earth...Be vigilant we are told...and then there is a litany of what a tyrant looks like... poor King George the third of England the principal example.

The gospels have something to say as well about this ultimate political question.... That is the question of 'how then shall we live?' The Gospels present a vision of a life of mutuality and collaboration, and sacrifice, all serving the cause of justice among equals....all are welcome at the banquet table, the metaphor...all have access to healing and wholeness...and safety....It is a vision of a life of Dignity and well-being; dignity and well-

being is for the new Testament scribes synonymous with salvation.... In God's world no one is above the other.... everything is shared.....and then the problem: there is opposition, tyranny waiting in the wings that would oppose such a vision....When Jesus refers to seeing Satan fall like lightning, he is making a not so veiled reference to the Emperor. He is referring to the power of the status quo...So also in the Gospel vision is the critique of the powers and principalities that would undermine such a life of gracious communion.... Critique, a decided and necessary edge to the gospels.... And make no mistake the critique is levelled at political power... and self-interested wealth. Jesus, after all, was put to death as a political activist.

Jesus sends out the seventy, a clear allusion to the seventy elders under the leadership of Moses in the desert of Sinai... elders whose job was to protect the new found freedom of the Israelites. Jesus sends out the seventy to do the work he intended to do, we are told.... This is an incarnational image, that the people of God, the followers of the Jesus Movement are commissioned to do the work of Jesus himself... bearing the Good News of how God intends things to be... and bearing critique... speaking Truth to Power, as it were. If we don't speak up in the face of corruption and deceit, and the abuse of power, then we are not doing our jobs as baptized Christians. So I say again, call your congressman and

Senators. Tell them that to keep children in squalid conditions, separated from their parents is immoral; ask them to do something about it. And why not be about getting meaningful immigration reform while we're at it.

Climate Change is a man-made crisis that threatens our very survival...

beginning with the poor first. That makes it a Gospel issue. The dispossession of Racism still plagues us; thrusting second-class citizenship on people of color. That's a Gospel issue. Anything that has to do with the dignity and well-being, and the empowerment of all of us, is our business as followers of Jesus.

We brothers and sisters are to be Gospel patriots...true to our native land, a land that holds up justice for all...but to be true we also have to be critics...informed critics who have honed their skills to speak the truth in love....Under the lens of the gospels the Declaration of Independence becomes a declaration of interdependence....this declaration viewed in light of the gospel is a call to equality and freedom and mutuality...serving always the good of the whole first. The greatest Good for the many.

And in this our beloved United States of America we have a long way to go don't we...A long way to go before this vision of a dignified way of life for all, all people, in every station, is perfected....It is for the people of conscience, people of faith...all faiths... to make it be so.

The dock on St. Andrew Bay, or what's left of it since hurricane Michael...and this country... and this planet belong to all of us in a sacred and intimate trust....We are in truth merely sojourners here on this earth and we need each other in a profound interdependence to make into reality God's gracious and imaginative will for this, God's creation, that groans still for equality and freedom and happiness and dignity.....we must bear up the least of us...the poor, the sick, the friendless, the imprisoned, the dispossessed...the North Korean, the Iranian.....We, citizens of the United States of America can no longer speak of our being apart and unique...that world is no more. In truth, that world never was...We live in one interdependent community...and we need each other living for each other... Our American religion of self-interest is destroying us.....The truth is that we are all so interconnected that the good of our sister and the good of our brother bear on what is good for us.....and there is one thing that the gospels address that the Declaration of Independence does not...and that is that we are called to be nonviolent....The greatest oxymoron ever coined is the term, just war.... Warfare is declared among the powerful, not by the people of nations. The "people" are just trying to live a good life like the rest of us.... Our gospel message, according to Luke, is first and foremost, "peace be with you." Because we are all interdependent, we're all of the

same family, the family of God...we know or should know that violence will not solve anything, as it never has... it will only beget new violence and continue the cycle of the abuse of power.

In our Gospel today the disciples are called on to share in the awesome power of Jesus... When we collaborate, and act and think as community marked by humility and sacrifice and Love of neighbor, we are wiser.... And true power, the life force itself to change the world, becomes exponential, ramifies beyond our knowing.... In our mere acts of love and sacrifice and advocacy... Satan falls like lightning.

To be a responsible and thankful citizen is an honorable and good thing...but we brothers and sisters are first and foremost citizens of the kingdom of God...So we must become wise... we must mature....we must develop the art of critique...we must persuade and influence...we must sacrifice... we must choose courage....all for the good of the whole, and in particular the outcasts and the least among us...we must act for sacred change for the better.....Perhaps the message of the water-lights on St. Andrew Bay which I can still see in my memory.... Perhaps the message is that there are no boundaries in the community of humanity. Would that that were true... Would that we take the courage to make it so.