

Sermon :: 28-June-2026
Proper 8, Year A

“Whoever welcomes *you*, welcomes *Me* ... and the One Who *sent Me*”

If you’ve been around All Souls’ more than a couple *months*, you probably know that I was a *lawyer* before I was a priest. And if you’ve been here more than a couple *minutes*, you probably know that I am something of a *nerd* ... well, maybe, a whole *lot* of nerd! It’s OK! I own it! As I approach the big six-oh, I’ve come to accept in myself the endless quest to know *exactly* how things work ... for ever more-minute levels of *detail* ... for using not just a ‘good’ word, but exactly-the-*right* one.

And, no surprise: This has been *me*, my whole *life*. I remember back in eighth grade social studies, with poor Mr Kravitz. We were doing a unit on the U.S. Constitution, and he mentioned—only in *passing*, mind you—that the president’s cabinet isn’t mentioned anywhere in the document. Well, *I* took that as a *challenge!* It *must* be in there! So, with the vast trove of civic knowledge and all the legal acumen of a thirteen-year old ... when I got home that afternoon, I pulled out my father’s old introduction-to-the-constitution book from *his* college days, and I pawed through it from cover-to-cover ... looking for *any* mention of the cabinet. I *did* eventually find one¹ ... but more importantly, I think my lifelong love of the law was probably ‘conceived’ that afternoon I spent poring over the founding document of the United States, for the very first time.

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We’re in the season of celebrating this nation’s semiquincentennial ... although as I remarked last week, you’d be hard pressed to find a whole of *people* paying it a whole lot of *attention*. But as I *also* remarked last week, I think it’s a shame ... a real missed opportunity ... to let America’s 250th birthday go by without at least a modicum of reflection on all the things we’ve gotten *right* ... and also gotten very *wrong* ... as a country. For whatever you think of the times we’re living in right *now* ... they are, after all, only a ‘blip’ in the quarter-*millennium* that’s passed since our founding.

And one of the things we’ve gotten *most* right, I think, is our Constitution. No doubt, it’s enshrined some truly *odious* policies ... harbored some not-so-innocent ‘blind-spots’ ... and contained some truly infelicitous provisions² ... *some*, although certainly not *all*, of which have been corrected, over time, through amendment. But just as *last* Sunday, we explored how the Declaration of Independence’s justification of *separation* ... for going *our own way* ... for declaring and demanding our *own individual* principles ... is consonant with Jesus’ message of standing up for *His* truth, *His* way, *His* love of *all* God’s human creatures ... so, *today*, I’d like to explore, ever so briefly, how the U.S. Constitution’s justification of our coming *together* ... for finding our *common* path ... for agreeing

¹ See Article II, Section 2, which says that the President may “require the Opinion, in writing, of the principal Officer in each of the executive Departments, upon any subject relating to their respective Offices.” If each head could give an individual opinion, I argued, why couldn’t they all give their collective opinion ... and thus be a cabinet of “principal Officers”? I don’t know whether Mr Kravitz actually agreed with me (and in truth, the issue is of hardly any importance (*but see* the 25th Amendment, which gives those same “principal officers” a role to play in the event of presidential inability to carry out the duties of office)); but at least for the sake of moving on with his lesson plan the next day, he *said* he did.

² I’m looking at *you*, Electoral College.

upon and asserting our *collective* principles ... is consonant with Jesus' ethos of *welcome, embrace and sacrifice*.

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If the Declaration of Independence is a strident document of revolutionary zeal—and ultimately, of *breaking up* ... the U.S. Constitution is a measured document of foundational sobriety—and ultimately, of *binding together*. In the fifty-two words of its brief preamble,³ it both hails and invokes the pursuit of a “perfect Union”; established “Justice”; “domestic Tranquility”; a “*common* defen[s]e”; the “*general Welfare*”; and the “Blessings of Liberty [for] *ourselves and our Posterity*.” This is a document born of compromise, mutuality and pervasive sense of IN-COMMON-NESS (one might even dare say *COMMUNION!*) ... as thirteen virulently independent states ... barely held together, until then, by a very loose and altogether unworkable federation ... set aside conflicts ... looked past differences ... perhaps even forgave old wrongs and saw past bitter hatreds ... in order to create—to *constitute*—a new order of *shared* power ... of *united* will ... of *decreased* independence, in the name of comity and order ... and of *increased* interdependence, in the name of prosperity and opportunity.

And while the body of the *Declaration* is a raft—indeed, a virtual *flotilla!*—of complaints and curses against a king, wholly despised and thrown-over ... the body of the *Constitution* is a blueprint—a roadmap—for co-existence and community for a people, thoroughly respected and united. It creates an in-common *legislature* to deal with everything from money and commerce ... to the mail and roads ... to an army and a navy ... pausing along the way to guarantee the free flow of ideas⁴ ... of goods⁵ ... and of citizens⁶ (while at the same time, we are morally compelled to note, sanctioning the depraved and hideous evil of human slavery). It creates an in-common *executive*, to enforce and administer the in-common laws the new legislature will make ... and an in-common *judiciary*, to interpret and apply those laws. And, in a clause that would come to be most severely tested some seventy years on ... it mandates that the once-*separate*—and even *-opposed*—states will henceforth *come together* to *protect* one another against both “foreign invasion” and “domestic violence.”⁷

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I do not claim the U.S. Constitution is either novel or unique: Other peoples, in other times, have created founding documents of similar—or even greater—principles and aspirations. Not only, however, has *our* Constitution stood the test of time, as the oldest active written constitution in the world⁸ ... but also, I find its *ethos* (if not every one of its *provisions*) very much aligned with Jesus' vision for the ‘right operation’ of this world—without ever once even mentioning His name. For this constitutional coming-together ... this mutuality ... this setting-aside of the individually petty that *divides* and embracing the collectively important that *unites* ... is *exactly* the image Jesus paints, today, as we hear Him preparing to send His disciples out into the mission field ... to proclaim⁹ His

³ Compare the 270 words of the Declaration's main preamble paragraph (*i.e.*, beginning, “We hold these truths ...”).

⁴ “To promote the Progress of Science and the useful Arts” (Art I, sec 8).

⁵ See Article I, section 9, paragraph 6, and Article I, section 10.

⁶ See Article IV, section 2, paragraph 1 (the “Privileges and Immunities” clause).

⁷ Art IV, section 4.

⁸ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constitution>. Since 1789, almost 800 other constitutions have been written and amended by other independent states. *Id.*

⁹ To a largely indifferent, if not openly hostile, world.

Good News of love and mercy, grace and peace. ¶You bring *Me*, Jesus tells them. And when others set aside their *own* agendas—the TRUTH WITHIN THEM—and welcome *you* ... then they welcome *Me*—the TRUTH FROM ABOVE—and we're *all* united, in *belief*. ¶You bring them *My* word—*God's* word—like a prophet (*or*, perhaps, a prophetic *document*). And when our fellow human-family members put down their *own* preferences and prejudices—the TRUTH WITHIN THEM—and accept the divine truth of the *prophet*—the TRUTH FROM ABOVE ... then we're *all* united, in *God's will*. ¶You model for them *My* righteousness—*My* goodness—*My* Godliness,¹⁰ and when our sisters and brothers turn from maximizing and glorifying *themselves*, against everyone else—the TRUTH WITHIN THEM, and instead take up *My* righteous ways—the TRUTH FROM ABOVE ... then we're *all* united, in living *God's common* vision for *all* humanity.

Indeed, Abraham is, perhaps, the 'keynote example' of sacrificing the TRUTH WITHIN US—what *we* want, *individually* ... for sake of the TRUTH FROM ABOVE—what God wants for us, *collectively*. Abraham's prepared ... willing ... to sacrifice his beloved son Isaac because God *asks* him to. For God asks only for a *good* reason: *not*, of course, because God actually *wants* Abraham to *kill* Isaac ... but rather, through Abraham's willingness to obey even God's most egregious requests, God both *reveals* and *galvanizes in* Abraham a complete *loyalty* to ... and a complete selflessness to *achieve* ... the *in-common* good God has in-store for Israel. Rather than *separating from* God, in the face of a patently horrifying request ... Abraham sets aside what *he* wants to be true—the TRUTH WITHIN US ... and *unites with* God, in a relationship of mutual trust and assurance—the TRUTH FROM ABOVE. And thus, Isaac will go on to father Jacob, who will, in turn, father the twelve tribes of Israel.

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As a nation, we're more prone to celebrate ... more eager to recount and dwell upon ... the *separation* story of the 1776 than the *coming-together* story ... the *relationship* story ... the *compromise* story ... the *sacrifice* story ... of 1789. No doubt, the Declaration of Independence is more stirring, more passionate and, let's be frank, less lawyerly; and as we said last week, its message of individual dignity and inherent worthiness ... and of fighting to *honor* and *uphold* them ... finds ready confirmation *throughout* Jesus' ministry: Jesus the Rabble-rouser and Table-turner-over.

But even if a duller and less compelling read, the U.S. Constitution is a document of unity and commitment ... of compromise and consideration ... of mutual regard and mutual aid ... of creating communion and living in love—the TRUTH FROM ABOVE. For whatever *else* "providing for the *common* defen[s]e, promot[ing] the *general* Welfare[] and secur[ing] the Blessings of *Liberty* [for] *ourselves* and our *Posterity*" may be ... it's *also* an echo of "love your neighbor as yourself" — and act of turning *from* the *individual* TRUTH WITHIN US—what *I* want ... and turning *toward* the *in-common* TRUTH FROM ABOVE—the truth of *common* good: the Truth we witness in Jesus the *Healer* and the *Feeder* ... the *Protector*¹¹ and the *Sacrifice*.

And so, then, the question for *next* week: How we can put together these two *equally* pivotal documents, that speak¹² two *equally* pivotal aspects of Jesus and His Good News ... the '*liberating*'

¹⁰ The Greek adjective here (δικαιος) describes one living by God's standards and actions.

¹¹ *E.g.*, of the woman accused of adultery (John 8:1-11).

¹² If only implicitly.

TRUTH WITHIN us and the '*unifying*' TRUTH FROM ABOVE ... in a way that will allow us, as a nation, not just to *survive*, but also to *thrive* ... for, God willing, *another 250 years*?

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