



Who Are We

May 31, 220

Rev. Dr. Craig Lindsey

My Uncle was a wonderful gardener and craftsman who lived in the City of Detroit. He was the kind of man who could plant the core of a Pear in his backyard and grow a tree. Every year for his birthday and Christmas we delighted in finding him the latest tool or gadget, which after opening, he would carry out to the Garage, "for the newness to wear off." Only after he had lived with something for months would he even start to use it, then making the tool indispensable because it had become a part of his toolbox.

Our Puritan ancestors came to this new land in the 1600s, the War for an Independent Republic happened beginning in 1776, but our Opening Hymn "America" was not written to celebrate our love of this Nation for another 50 years. Most often, only after we have lived with change, do we come to claim and understand the significance of living into a different reality. Hymns, songs, traditions help reinforce why these freedoms and traditions are important.

MEMORIAL DAY was never intended to be a Holiday from Quarantine.

MEMORIAL DAY was not made a National Holiday to celebrate the Beginning of Summer.

Having marched from Cemetery to cemetery in civic parades for the last 20 years, MEMORIAL DAY is not to celebrate our Military, or our Veterans, Politicians or First Responders.

Contemporary circumstance obscures that in the War Between the States we were BOTH Patriot and Enemy, more Americans died in that conflict than in any war before or since because both sides were Americans, the whole Nation suffered as we questioned what it means for us TO WANT TO BE United States.

As Diane described for us, there was no Israel before Passover. When God passed-over those who had been slaves while the First-born of the Egyptians died of plague, the slaves were allowed to pass-over the dry bed of the Red Sea, as Pharaoh and his chariots were stuck in the mud and drowned. We tend to have a condensation of history, that Moses led the people out of Egypt and into the Promised Land, like going from Green Valley to Sahuarita or Nogales, when this was a 40 year journey of becoming a People of God.

As long as anyone could remember, the people had been slaves. As slaves, you do not think for yourselves, you do not sleep-in until you want to get up, you do not bathe when you want, or eat what or when you want. All your life, and the lives of your parents and grandparents for generations, you have been made to do what the Pharaoh wanted, or else you died, often being whipped while doing what you were made to do, to reinforce who was in charge and who was a slave. You were not permitted to fall in love and marry, you were property that was bought and sold and bred like animals. There was no education, no career, no retirement, from the time you could walk until the moment of your death you were a slave, who looked to the slave master, who looked to the Pharaoh for what you should think, what you could say, what you would do. Suddenly you were set free in the wilderness. But you have never been allowed to think for yourself, never been taught to reason, how are you to live? The people looked to Moses to be their new Pharaoh, their King. On their 50th day in the wilderness, God gave the people Commandments to govern how they would live, in relationship to God and in relationship to one another. On the Day of

Pentecost, the people received the 10 Commandments as a Gift from God. The 10 Commandments changed the people from being escaped slaves in the wilderness to becoming a People of God searching for the Promised Land. The Day of Pentecost became equated with God giving us a gift to be God's people.

Once Israel came into the Promised Land, growing into a Monarchy and great Nation, then facing the Diaspora, the Day of Pentecost developed other traditions. Some describe that The Day of Pentecost was related to the Harvest Festival of Sukuoth, but this is Spring? In order to have a Harvest Festival in the Fall, there first needs to be a Festival of Spring. On the Day of Pentecost you went out to inspect the blossoms of fruit trees, the vines that are growing, all the produce of life both animal and plant. You tied a Red Ribbon or Thread around the First Fruits. The First Fruits could be the First to Blossom, or they could be first as in the very Best. Whatever you designated as First Fruits were pledged as an Offering to God. A Draught may come, a Plague of locusts, we do not know what the future holds. But giving our first and best produce to God, was an act of faith and commitment, trusting that God would provide for us from all the rest. In that way, the Day of Pentecost also became tied to the Blessing of Noah to be fruitful and multiply in the Land.

Over two thousand years, we have incorporated a great number of traditions in Easter. Three days after Jesus was buried, he rose from the Dead! Early while it was still dark, Mary went to the Tomb. We now have Sunrise Worship Services, Easter Lilies, Trumpets, Choral Alleluias, Eggs and Bunnies, Jelly Beans, Bonnets and Gloves, all of which represent Easter. But when Easter first happened, there was 40 Days of mourning and sadness, disillusionment, surprise, fear as Jesus appeared to the disciples again and again.

On the 50th Day, the Day of Pentecost, the Disciples were once again practicing social distancing by being locked in the Upper Room for Fear, when God gave to them a gift for the living of life in faith. Remember back to that favorite passage about Elijah in the same Cave where Moses had gone for proof of seeing God? The first image of God Elijah seeks is Wind, the second image he expects of God's presence is Fire. In the Upper Room the Disciples hear the sound of a Mighty Wind, then they see Fire distributed above each disciple! What greater proof do they need that God is in this moment? But they go outside to look. Jerusalem is and has since the time of Jesus been a very cosmopolitan place with people of faith from every different country and nation. Miraculously, the disciples are able to speak to each individually in their own language. Notice that it is not that everyone understands the disciples speak in Aramaic, Greek or Hebrew, or even speaking in Tongues (that comes later in one of the early Churches with Paul). Although they are not learned, educated cosmopolitan world travelers, the disciples are able to make themselves clear to all these different people in their own language.

There is a wonderful story from Elisabeth Kubler Ross, when she was researching the writing of her first book on the Stages of Death and Dying. Part of her research required going from room to room interviewing those who were dying in the hospital, trying to put into words what they thought and how they felt about death. She began to notice a pattern that while generally people were troubled by this, when a certain Cleaning woman had been in the room, the patients would be calm, peaceful and tranquil. One day, she ran into the Orderly in the hallway and asked "What are you doing to my patients?" The Orderly thought she was being reprimanded, and said she was not doing anything. Dr. Ross said "No, no, whatever you are doing is a good thing. After you clean their rooms they seem at peace. What are you doing to my patients?" "I just talk" the Orderly said. "You know, I had two babies of my own who each died on my lap. But God never abandoned me. I tell them that. I tell them they are not alone, that God is with them, and they do not have to be afraid." That is what Pentecost is all about, living with the reality of God, different from when the idea is brand new.

Our Musician Wes Moulton shared with us the words of the Episcopal Priest, Rev. Nadia Bolz-Weber about this time 50 days into the Pandemic of COVID 19. For me, just as America the Beautiful names my love and devotion to this land; just as the 10 Commandments describe who I am in relationship to God and to you, these her words describe who I want to believe, and what I want to say at this time of Pandemic:

“I do not know for certain when we can gather together in worship again, LORD. So for now, I just ask:

When I sing along with Stevie Wonder’s Songs in the Key of Life while I am working in my kitchen, may it be counted as a Hymn of Praise to You LORD.

When I read the news and my heart tightens in my chest, may it be a Kyrie “LORD, have mercy. Christ, have mercy. LORD, have mercy.

When my eyes crinkle as I smile behind my mask, in gratitude to the person at the Grocery Check out, let this be Passing the Peace of Christ.

When I water the plants, wash my dishes, when I wash my hands, when the water splashes down on my head in the shower, may these remind me I am Baptized and loved by God.

When tears come, my shoulders shake and my breathing falters, may this be counted as a prayer to You.

When I stumble upon a Facebook posting, or scene in a movie or book about the grace and love of God, may this be counted as listening to a good sermon.

And as each of us sit at our tables in the upper room of our apartments, eating one more homemade meal, slowly, joyfully, with nothing else demanding my time or attention, may this be counted as communion.”