

Our Independence Day
[Luke 10:1-11, 16-20](#)

“Good morning. In less than an hour, aircraft from here will join others from around the world. And you will be launching the largest aerial battle in the history of mankind. "Mankind." That word should have new meaning for all of us today. We can't be consumed by our petty differences anymore. We will be united in our common interests. Perhaps its fate that today is the Fourth of July, and you will once again be fighting for our freedom... Not from tyranny, oppression, or persecution... but from annihilation. We are fighting for our right to live. To exist. And should we win the day, the Fourth of July will no longer be known as an American holiday, but as the day the world declared in one voice: ‘We will not go quietly into the night!’ We will not vanish without a fight! We're going to live on! We're going to survive! Today we celebrate our Independence Day!”

I don't know if any of you recognized that quote from the very popular movie called, Independence Day, when a group of aliens threatened to destroy the world. Suddenly groups from all over our world who were traditionally enemies came together with a common cause to change the fate of the world. I'll bet you also wondering how in the world this fits in with today's scripture lesson! Stay with me – let's see where we end up!

The scripture from Luke describes Jesus appointing disciples to go out ahead of him into different towns and places, sharing the good news of the gospel; sharing the news that the Messiah had truly come; sharing the blessings of healing and comfort; sharing the blessings of healed minds by driving out demons in the name of Jesus the Christ. Since Jesus sent out seventy disciples, I believe there were exactly seventy disciples at the time.

All of us are called to share the good news of Jesus Christ the risen Savior to all the world. Jesus came to this world to be our advocate with the Father. We are God's creation, yet we have strayed from God's will through our sins of greed and selfishness, pride and deceit. Through Jesus we are a forgiven people – we are no longer bound by our sin and rejection. We can celebrate our Independence Day!

Today we also celebrate the anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence for our country. Gary Hildreth of Erie, PA makes these observations: Have you ever wondered what happened to those men who signed the Declaration of Independence?

- Five signers were captured by the British as traitors, and tortured before they died.
- Twelve had their homes ransacked and burned.
- Two lost their sons in the Revolutionary Army
- Another had two sons captured.

- Nine of the 56 fought and died from wounds or the hardships of the Revolutionary War.

What kind of men were they? Twenty-four were lawyers and jurists. Eleven were merchants, nine were farmers and large plantation owners, men of means, well educated. But they signed the Declaration of Independence knowing full well that the penalty would be death if they were captured. They signed and they pledged their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor.

Carter Braxton of Virginia, a wealthy planter and trader, saw his ships swept from the seas by the British navy. He sold his home and properties to pay his debts, and died in rags. Thomas McKean was so hounded by the British that he was forced to move his family almost constantly. He served in the Congress without pay, and his family was kept in hiding. His possessions were taken from him, and poverty was his reward. Vandals or soldiers or both, looted the properties of Ellery, Clymer, Hall,

Walton, Gwinnett, Heyward, Rutledge, and Middleton. At the Battle of Yorktown, Thomas Nelson Jr. noted that the British General Cornwallis had taken over the Nelson home for his headquarters. The owner quietly urged General George Washington to open fire, which was done. The home was destroyed, and Nelson died bankrupt. Francis Lewis had his home and properties destroyed. The enemy jailed his wife, and she died within a few months. John Hart was driven from his wife's bedside as she was dying. Their 13 children fled for their lives. His fields and his grist mill were laid waste. For more than a year he lived in forests and caves, returning home after the war to find his wife dead, his children vanished. A few weeks later he died from exhaustion and a broken heart. Norris and Livingston suffered similar fates.

Such were the stories and sacrifices of the American Revolution. These were not wild-eyed, rabble-rousing ruffians. There were soft-spoken men of means and education. They had security, but they valued liberty more. Standing tall, straight, and unwavering, they pledged: "For the support of this declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of the Divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other, our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor."

We see a similar spirit of dedication and fire in the disciples as they went to share the gospel in hostile territory taking nothing for the journey. This is probably the first time Jesus sent them into the mission field without his leadership and guidance. Not only did they need to muster their confidence as messengers of God, but they also had to leave behind their worldly possessions and possible comforts. I believe courage is a gift from God.

Many of our forefathers were Christians of various denominations, yet even those who were not saw the importance of physical independence for our nation. I'm sure we can find similar dedication and sacrifice from those who built this church 129 years ago. Why did they do it? Was it for fame or fortune or pride or prestige? I doubt it. This church was built to provide local residence a place to worship God together.

Yet today, many seem to neglect the lack of independence for our souls when we choose to turn away from God our Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer. We enjoy freedom in this country that is often overlooked or taken for granted. Our democratic system may be flawed but is still envied by many citizens of other nations around the world. We are still 'one nation under God', aren't we? When every President ends his speech with, "God Bless America," what does that mean? My hope and prayer is that God continues

to call God's people back into relationship with God. Our true independence as individuals and as a nation is in the awesome power of the crucified and risen Christ.

Today is also our two-year anniversary together. How are we doing? Are we working together to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world? Last week I extended a challenge to each of us to pray through our directory so that within a week's time, everyone in that directory would be prayed for by everyone in this congregation. How did we do? It's harder than it seems! I encourage you to keep this practice and pray for each other every week.

We set our mission and vision statements two years ago. Our vision – To help members of our community find a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Our Mission – we will work toward this vision by enhancing our worship service, promoting

programs for children and young families, and enhancing our communications. A team of us has worked together to do some creative things in worship. We've had some technical difficulties but all in all I think we are maintaining our focus on worshipping and celebrating God in our midst – even when we are making a joyful noise with attitude! Our VBS program is just around the corner. Already the excitement is buzzing as we prepare to host this fantastic program as a way to connect with children and their families in the area. We also continue to work on our communications – take a look at the signs out front and our awesome website! Let us continue to help our neighbors find a comfortable place of worship where all are welcomed. Together we can celebrate our souls' Independence Day. Amen.