

"DECLARE YOUR INTERDEPENDENCE"

A Sermon By

Philip A. C. Clarke

Park Avenue United Methodist Church
106 East 86th Street
New York, New York 10028
July 4, 1993

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INTRODUCTION

Today we celebrate our national day of independence - a pivotal holiday of the American people, given to patriotic speeches, fireworks and family outings. Cars by the millions are jamming the highways this weekend taking droves of us out to the parks and beaches, the lakes and the mountains. For many, it is a welcome mid-summer break from work.

I sometimes find myself wondering what philosophical or spiritual meaning it should hold for us. We know it's a celebration of the signing of the Declaration of Independence on July 4th, 1776. We mark it as a day on the calendar to pay tribute to freedom and independence, to think and to speak, to come and to go and to worship God as we choose. In a political sense, we realize that the original Declaration is still something to work for, something that hasn't happened yet for some people, and that with all we have achieved in the past 217 years there is still some growing and stretching to be done.

INTERDEPENDENT

For one thing, we need to remember that the Declaration of Independence was not the act of one individual, but rather it was a cooperative effort of some brave and visionary men. They well knew that if their cause failed they would be convicted of treason and put to death. One recalls those cautious and sobering words of Benjamin Franklin,

"We must all hang together, or we will all hang separately"

Although we celebrate our political independence this day, we must continue to realize that we are just as "inter-dependent" today as were those bold and brave patriots of 1776. Nobody is truly independent today. Nobody can really get along entirely by himself. On the contrary, we depend upon one another in these modern times more than human beings ever have in the past.

COOPERATION IS CALLED FOR

Cooperation is called for all around us. Therefore, give thought this day not so much to independence, but rather to interdependence.

Think of all those individuals who get us through a day with their labors: the South American coffee grower, the dairy farmer who provides the milk for our coffee and breakfast cereal; the bus driver or the subway motor man, the taxi driver, the policeman, the sanitation worker, the mailman, the telephone employer, the grocer, the barber, the beautician, the dressmaker, the doctor, the lawyer, the judge, the novelist, the entertainer, the poet, the cook, the teacher, the nurse. Were it not for these good and faithful folk and many others we would be as helpless as Robinson Crusoe when he first reached his little island - outcasts in a wilderness of confusion - because no person is really independent.

To me, there's nothing quite so sad as the person so independent by nature as to refuse the guidance or the love of those who offer help along the way. Man is born a helpless creature, totally in need of protection and nurture. Maturing a bit he aspires to independence. "I want to do it myself" the child often exclaims as he grows up. But that spirit can sometimes lead one off into the far country, as it were...as it did with the Prodigal Son...with thoughts of standing, walking, working - alone...completely alone.

"Why don't you get back in there and play the beautiful music that's there in you. Play second violin so well that they will want you back on first violin. Come and get back in tune with the rest of us instruments...."

And so we're told that the violin followed the wise counsel of the cello, taking his place humbly as second violin and poured out his soul as best he could playing the beautiful music he was capable of playing. Back in tune again. And whereupon his own owner was reassigned to first violin and never again did he have to play "second fiddle" to anyone.

Many people go through life playing "second fiddle" because they insist upon being completely independent...out of step and out of harmony with others around them. It reminds me of the story of the young army recruit from Kentucky whose parents paid him a visit at boot camp and then came home and bragged about their Johnny to everyone in town. They said to their friends,

"And you should have seen our Johnny in uniform...they even had a parade while we were there. And everyone in that parade was out of step but our boy, Johnny...and how proud we are of him."

CLOSING THOUGHTS

Paul, in writing to the Romans (chapter 14, verse 19), said this:

"Let us then pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another..."

On this July 4th Day of National Independence, let us affirm our interdependence. Our lives are linked together with others. Remember that we need each other. Let us be involved in the stream of love with others. Remember, too, that liberty is the luxury of self-discipline. I believe we can solve our national problems and help to meet the many challenges of our day and our time only as we love and respect each other.

Affirm this day as a "declare day" and whoever you are and wherever you have come from, declare your interdependence and say to all who help and serve and who guide and protect and direct your life,

"Friend...I thank you. I thank you for helping me to make my life what it is...for giving me the gift of freedom. And I thank you for holding my hand in time of difficulty, and for sharing in those tasks with which we are involved. Together....so that we can all live in this precious land of freedom and prosperity for all."

PRAYER On this day of our National Independence, O God, remind us again that our common destiny is bound up with each other. Move us to be more "inter-dependent" in our thinking....more inclusive of those who may look and be different from ourselves.

We rejoice in the great dreams upon which this land was founded. We rejoice that we live in a land where we may worship as we choose, and that we can come together in this church that is open and inclusive and share together in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

May the bread and the wine open our eyes to the presence of Christ in our midst. Bind us more closely to each other and to Him and lift us up that we may go forth from here seeing life from higher ground, renewed in body and soul and with hearts filled with love and peace.

God of comfort, our thoughts reach out to include those who rest in hospital beds in need of your healing blessing. Those who are ill, those, too, who have lost loved ones in recent days...their names are known to You....and we pray for those who are torn by the bewilderment of severed relationships, those whose hopes have temporarily been smashed.

Be with each of us now and answer the unspoken prayers offered to You on the altars of our hearts and in the name of the Good Shepherd who knows his sheep by name and gently calls them home. Amen.

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I sometimes find myself wondering what philosophical or spiritual meaning should it hold for us. We know it's a celebration of the signing of the Declaration of Independence on July 4th, 1776. We mark it as a day on the calendar to pay tribute to freedom and independence, to think and speak and come and go and to worship God as we choose. In a political sense, we realize that the original Declaration is still something to work for, something that hasn't happened yet, that with all we have achieved in the past 212 years there is still some growing and stretching to be done.

DEVELOPMENT

For one thing, we need to remember that the Declaration of Independence was not the act of an individual; rather, it was a cooperative effort of some brave and visionary men. They well knew that if their cause failed they would be convicted of treason and put to death. Recall Benjamin Franklin's sober, cautious words,

"We must all hang together, or we will all hang separately".

Although we celebrate our political independence this weekend, we must continue to realize that we are just as interdependent today as were those bold patriots of 1776. Nobody is truly independent today; nobody can really get along entirely by himself. On the contrary, we depend upon one another in these modern times more than human beings ever have in the past.

COOPERATION IS CALLED FOR

Cooperation is called for all around us. Therefore, give thought this weekend not to independence but to interdependence.

Think of all those individuals who get us through a day with their labors: the South American coffee grower, the dairy farmer who provides the milk for our coffee and eggs for the breakfast meal; the subway motorman or bus driver, the taxi driver, the policeman, the sanitation worker, the mailman, the telephone employee who punches the switchboards, the grocer and his suppliers, the barber, the dressmaker, the doctor, the lawyer, the lawyer, the judge, the novelist, the poet, the cook, the teacher, the nurse, the waitress. Were it not for these good folk and many others we would be as helpless as Robinson Crusoe when he first reached his island - outcasts in a wilderness of confusion because no person is really independent.

There's nothing quite so sad as a person so independent by nature as to refuse the guidance or love of those who offer help in his desperation. Man is born a helpless creature, totally in need of protection and nurture. Maturing a bit he aspires to independence. "I want to do it myself" exclaims the child. But that spirit can sometimes lead one into the far country, as it were, as it did with the Prodigal Son, with thoughts of standing, walking, working - alone, completely alone. Whereas in actuality no one has ever succeeded, in any endeavor, who has not in some way been dependent upon the power of God within.

himself and upon the hands of others around him...contributing in ways both direct and indirect.

When Jesus stressed, "Love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength", "and love your neighbor as yourself", He was dealing with what we term independence and interdependence.

MATURING PROCESS

A person matures in a spiritual sense as he or she grows in the realization that we must feed each other in life. Said Jesus, "I - if I be lifted up - will draw all men unto Me". You cannot have prosperity unless you help others to prosper. And you cannot have harmony unless you are willing to promote the harmony of the world.

This means that we must love God to establish a consciousness of "being within - dependent", and then love our neighbor to be interdependent. I believe that love is the key to freedom, to true independence. Turn on the switch of love for other people - for your work, for all of your experiences, for life itself. Avoid from now on the mistake of simply tolerating people and putting up with them, enduring them. We are able to love when we understand how much we need each other and how much we are interdependent, and when we learn to appreciate people for what they are and for what they do!

AN OLD TIBETIAN GREETING

There is an interesting greeting that comes to us from Tibet. It begins with two people bowing to each other and extending their hands - palms open - and stick out their tongues, indicating symbolically that there are no knives in their hands or evil words on their tongues.

Now, I'm not suggesting that you take up this mode of greeting and acknowledge your friends in this fashion, but you would certainly do well in practice to indicate that there is no malice in your intentions, no vicious words on your tongue. When we realize the spirit of interdependence, we no longer let ourselves get out of tune with God letting pride and egotism and willfulness take over. We are grateful to friends and associates and neighbors who are channels through which much of our good comes to us, and we are not so concerned as we were formerly as to who goes first or who gets all the credit.

THE STORY OF THE VIOLIN

I have always been fond of the story of the willful violin, who was very old and of great value and of which he was very conscious, boasting to the other instruments in the orchestra that he had been made by Stradivarius himself and alleging that he could if he wished produce the world's most beautiful music.

But one day the violin's owner was assigned to second violin in a series of orchestrations. The violin's pride was hurt and he angrily decided to teach everyone a lesson for not properly appreciating him by getting out of tune and staying that way. He thereby spoiled the music of the entire orchestra and before long there was talk of his owner and he being released and of his being sold to a second hand dealer.

"See here" said the cello one day when the violin was being his worst. He said,

"Why don't you get back in tune and express the beautiful music that is in you. Play second violin so well that

they will want you back on first part. Come on, get back with the rest of us instruments and with the director."

Well, the violin followed the wise advice of the cello, taking his place humbly as second violin and poured out his soul as best he could in beautiful music, back in tune again, whereupon his own owner was reassigned to first violin and never again did he have to play second fiddle to anyone.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

So many of us go through life playing "second fiddle" because we insist upon being independent....willfully out of harmony with the needs and the place of those around us.

So, the brief message of this July 4th Sunday weekend - our day of national independence - is that we need to declare our interdependence...to declare how much we need one another, to get involved in the stream of love for one another.

Needing one another. Respecting one another. Loving one another. I believe we can solve our national problems and help to meet the many challenges of our day - both great and small - as love and respect each other. Let this be a declare day, and whoever you are, and wherever you go, declare your inter-dependence, and say to all those who help and serve and guide and protect your life,

"Friend...I thank you. I thank you for helping me to make my life what it is...for giving me the gift of freedom. And I thank you for holding my hand in time of difficulty, for sharing in the tasks with which we are involved together...so that we can all live in a land of freedom and prosperity for all."

PRAYER

On this day of national independence, make us to be more inter-dependent...realizing that our common destiny is bound up with each other's life.

Thankful that we live in a land where we may worship as we choose, and that we can come together in this church this Sunday and share in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

May the bread and the wine open our eyes, O God, to the presence of Christ in our midst. Bind us more closely to each other and to Him and lift us up that we may go forther from here strengthened, steadied, seeing life from higher ground, renewed in body and soul and filled with peace, love and courage.

God of comfort, our thoughts reach out to include those in need of your healing blessing. Those who are ill, in the hospital, those who have lost loved ones, those who are torn by the bewilderment of severed relationships, those whose hopes have temporarily been mmashed.

Be with each of us now and answer the unspoken prayers offered to You on the altars of our hearts in this time of worship. Amen.

ANNOUNCEMENTS: Sunday, July 3, 1988

I. HOLY COMMUNION

- A. It has long been the custom...to celebrate the Sacrament of Holy Communion on the first Sunday...and we like to announce.. that the Table of our Lord is open to all...one does not have to be a member...
- B. His Table is open to all...and we invite all of you to receive the Sacrament...trusting that the time for you may be an occasion of re-dedication, reconsecration, renewal of your life to the will of God as it comes to us in the life and love...
- C. A brief word regarding procedure. The elements will be served to you in the pews...upon receiving them, please hold...

II. GREETING / VISITORS

- A. We take this moment to greet the visitors....delighted to have you with us...and we hope that we shall have the opportunity...
- B. Be free in the sharing of your name. Sign a visitor card or a Guest Book. Join us on other Sundays in worship, fellowship and service in this Church that has been ministering - in the name of Christ - to the needs of people in this city since 1857.

III. PARISH CONCERNS

- A. Be sure to pick up your copy of the July issue of our monthly news sheet. Copies....it shares word of our July programs and opportunities....with thanks to Lucy Dinnes
- B. Remember that we have a mid-week opportunity for Bible study, fellowship and spiritual "uplift" - Wednesdays at 7:30... proving to be popular...for those of you who are away on weekends and don't get to Church...keep it in mind.

IV. THIS WEEKEND

- A. Memorial Day weekend. Labor Day weekend. July 4th weekend. These are apt to be three "low"..."quiet" Sundays for our Church as so many take to the mountains, the lakes, the beaches, the parks...
- B. I'm pleased so many of you are here and grateful for your presence. Over the years I've discovered that human need takes no holiday and that on Sundays like this the needs of people

are apt to be even greater...the need for worship, for fellowship and friends, for guidance and support along the way....thank you for coming.

- C. I look to the Summer when we shall have "100 plus" each Sunday from the beginning of July to early September... 100 each Sunday...so let's go for it...ten Sundays in a row with 100 plus each Sunday. And include the children with the count!
- D. I would mention that Phyllis Westerman is a patient in Columbia Presbyterian Hospital...undergoing some tests.
- E. Are there any other concerns to share...

V. OFFERING

- A. Jesus said, "It is more blessed to give than it is to receive".

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"DELCARE YOUR INTERDEPENDENCE"

INTRODUCTION Yesterday we celebrated our national day of independence - something of a "pivotal" holiday of the American people, a day given to patriotic speeches, parades, fireworks and family outings. Cars by the millions are jamming highways and thruways this weekend taking droves of us to parks and beaches and mountains. For many, it is a welcome mid-Summer break from work. In spite of the rain, it was a good day for John McInroe and America.

However, what philosophical or spiritual meaning should such a day hold for us as Christians. We know it's a celebration of the signing of the Declaration of Independence back there on July 4th, 1776. We mark it as a day on the calendar to pay tribute to freedom and independence, to think and speak and to come and go and to worship God as we choose. How blessed we are that we have this freedom as Christians. In a political sense we realize that the original Declaration is still something to work for, something that hasn't happened yet for all, that with all we have achieved in the past 205 years that there is still some growing to be done. in that direction.

DEVELOPMENT It's well for us to remember on a day such as this that the Declaration of Independence was not the act of an individual; rather, it was a cooperative effort of some rather courageous, visionary men. They well knew that if their cause failed they would be convicted of treason and put to death. Remember Benjamin Franklin's sober, cautious words,

"We must all hang together, or we will all hang separately".

Although we celebrate our political independence this weekend, we must continue to realize that we're just as interdependent today as were those bold and brave patriots of 1776. Nobody is truly independent today. Nobody can really get along entirely by himself or herself. On the contrary, we depend upon one another in these modern times more than human beings ever have in the past.

COOPERATION Put down then as one of the thoughts of this hour that cooperation is called for all around us. Give thought this weekend to a Declaration, if you will, of Interdependence. Franklin's words are still true...

Think for a moment of all those individuals who help to get us through a day with their labors: the South American coffee grower; the dairy farmer who provides us with milk and eggs for a first meal of the day; the people who give us a paper to read before we head out the door; the subway motorman, the taxi driver, the oil field worker, the policeman, the sanitation worker, the mailman, the telephone employees who punch the switchboards, the grocer and his suppliers, the barber, the dressmaker, the doctor, the lawyer, the congressman, the judge, the novelist, the poet, the cook, the teacher, the waitress. Were it not for all these good people and many more...why we'd be as helpless as Robinson Crusoe when he first reached his island, outcasts in a wilderness of confusion, because no person is really independent.

There's nothing quite so sad as a person so independent by nature as to compulsively refuse the guidance or assistance or love of those who offer help along the way. Man is born a helpless creature, totally in need of protection and nurture. Maturing a bit he aspires to independence. Exclaims the child,

"Here...let me do it by myself". Such an attitude can sometimes lead one into "the far-off country" as it did in the case of the Prodigal Son whose story was read a few minutes ago...with thoughts of walking, standing, working and succeeding alone, completely alone. We applaud independence, but when it is carried to an extreme it can be non-productive. In actuality no one ever succeeds in any endeavor who has not in some way been dependent upon the power of God within himself and upon the hands and hearts of others around him... contributing in ways both direct and indirect.

I believe that Jesus when He stressed "love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength and love your neighbor as yourself" was dealing with what we term independence and interdependence. Both receive his emphasis.

MATURING PROCESS I believe that one really matures in a spiritual sense in life as one grows in the realization that we must feed each other in life. Said Jesus, "If I be lifted up, I will draw all men unto Me". You cannot have prosperity unless you are willing to help others prosper. You cannot have harmony unless you are willing to help promote the harmony of all in the world.

This means that we must love God in order to establish a consciousness of being "with-in dependent", and love our neighbor to be "inter-dependent".

The great key to freedom, to true independence, is love (as Mr. Proctor stressed last Sunday). Turn on that "switch" of love for other people, beam it and focus it in that direction for your work, your life, all you do. Avoid from now on the mistake of simply tolerating people...putting up with them... enduring them. Try loving them. We are able to love when we understand how much we need each other and how much we are inter-dependent, and when we learn to appreciate people for what they are and what they do!

ILLUSTRATIONS There's an interesting greeting associate with the people of Tibet in which two persons bow, extend their hands palms open, and then stick out their tongues, indicating in symbolic fashion that there are no knives in their hands and no evil, hurtful words on their tongues.

Now, I'm not suggesting that we take up this mode of greeting and acknowledging our friends, but we would certainly do well in practice to indicate that there is no malice in our intentions, no vicious or hurtful words on our tongues. When we come to realize and to fully practice this spirit of interdependence, we no longer let ourselves get out of touch or tune with God's spirit in the consciousness of pride and egotism and selfishness and willfulness. We are grateful to associates, to friends, to neighbors, who are channels through which much of our good comes to us and we are not so concerned as we formerly were as to who goes first and who gets the credit. Remember: do a lot of kingdom building

if you aren't concerned who gets credit!
Then there's the story of the willful violin, who was old and of great value and of which he was very conscious, boasting to the other instruments in the orchestra that he had been made by Stradivarius himself and alleging that he could, if he wished, produce the world's most beautiful music.

But one day the violin's owner was assigned to second violin in a series of orchestrations. The violin's pride was hurt and he angrily decided to teach everyone a lesson for not properly appreciating him by getting out of tune and staying that way. He thereby spoiled the music of the entire orchestra and before long there was talk of his owner and he being released and sold to a secondhand dealer.

"See here" said the cello one day when the violin was being his worst. "Why don't you get back in tune and express the beautiful music that is there in you? Play second violin so well they will want you back on the first part. Come on, get back with the rest of us instruments and with the director." Well, the violin followed the wise advice of the cello, taking his place quietly and humbly as second violin and poured out his soul as best he could in beautiful music....back in tune again...whereupon his own owner was reassigned to first violin and never again did he have to play second fiddle to anyone.

CLOSING I guess you might say that many go through life playing second fiddle because we insist upon being totalling independent...willfully out of harmony with the needs and pace of our friends and loved ones.

So, today on this July 4th weekend, when we celebrate our independence and declare it, let's try to declare some interdependence...and to remember how much we need one another, and to get involved in the stream of love for one another.

Needing one another. Respecting one another. Loving one another. I believe we can solve our problems - personal and political, social...whatever...if we spend more time declaring our interdependence and less declaring our independence. Say to all who help and serve and guide and support your life:

"Friend, I thank you for helping me to make my life what it is....for giving me the gift of freedom. And I thank you for holding my hand in times of stress and strain, for sharing in the tasks with which we are involved so that we can all live in a land of freedom and prosperity for all."

PRAYER On this weekend when we pause to celebrate our Day of National independence, make us to be more willing to consider our interdependence...both as a nation and as individuals in that nation...realizing that our common destiny is tied in and bound up with the lives of others. Remind those who lead us of this truth...that they may be more compassionate.

Thankful we are, O God, that we do live in a land where we may worship as we choose, that we can come together in this Church this morning and share in the sacred symbols of our Lord's Last Supper.

Help us to think afresh those words of Jesus that "I, if I be lifted up, shall draw all men unto me". ~~Help us~~

Help us to lift Him up before others in all we say and do. And may the bread and wine open our eyes, O God, to the presence of the Christ spirit, remembering how He gave His life for all, not just some. Bind us more closely to Him and lift up our hearts and minds to You that we may go forth from here renewed in body and soul, with peace and love and faith at the center of our lives.

God of Comfort, our thoughts reach out to include those friends and loved ones who are in need of your healing touch - those who are ill, those who in recent days have lost loved ones, those torn by indecision and confronted by temptation, those bewildered by severed relationships, those whose hopes have been temporarily smashed.

Be with each of us and answer now the unspoken prayers we offer in the name and spirit of Christ.

ANNOUNCEMENTS: July 5, 1981

HOLY COMMUNION It is the custom of this Church to celebrate the Sacrament of Holy Communion on the first Sunday of each month. We like to announce - especially for the benefit of visitors in the congregation - that the Table of our Lord is open to all. One does not have to be a member of this parish, nor of this denomination in order to receive the Sacrament. His Table is open to all.

We would invite all of you to receive the Sacrament here this hour. It will be served to you at the altar rail. The ushers will indicate to you when to come forward. And we hope that the time for you may be an occasion of spiritual renewal - a moment of reaffirmation and rededication of your life to the will of God and the way of Jesus Christ.

GREETING We take this moment to greet the visitors in the congregation. We're pleased to have you with us and we hope that the opportunity will be ours to greet you in a more personal way - either at the door as you depart, or - if time permits - downstairs in the Russell Room where punch and cookies will be served.

Be free in the sharing of your name. Sign one of our Guest Books or one of the Welcome Visitors cards. And join us on other Sunday in our worship and in our fellowship together in a Church that has been ministering in the name of Christ to the needs of people in this city since 1837. It is in His name that we today bid you welcome.

CONCERNS Be sure to pick up a copy of the July issue of "A Word In Edgeways". Copies are on the table by the door in the narthex and also downstairs in the Russell Room.

You'll note that a Rummage Sale is "in the works" for this coming Saturday, July 11th. The doors open at ten and help is appreciated by Jan Ernst who will be heading it up. If you can see your way to "lend a hand"...

On the first Sunday of the month the small love loaf banks will be on the table in the Russell Room for your monthly contributions to the world hunger fund of our Church. Our monthly news sheet tells you in detail about our continuing emphasis on world hunger needs and how you may respond. Love loaf banks will be available each Sunday we celebrate communion. Take one, and fill it up and return it on the first Sunday of August.

JULY 4 Memorial Day weekend. July 4th weekend. Labor Day weekend. These are the three "low" Sundays in this church during the year as so many of our members and friends take to the mountains or beaches...or wherever. I'm pleased so many of you are here, and grateful for your response to the ten o'clock hour of worship which we shall follow from now through Labor Day Sunday.

Over the years I have discovered that human need in this city takes no holiday and that on Sundays like this the needs of many people in the city are apt to be even greater and many may experience loneliness.... separation...

It's good to see so many here....as I mentioned last Sunday, we hope to have a string of ten Sundays in a row with at least 100 people here for worship....about half of what we have during other times of the year.

OFFERING

Jesus said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive".
In this spirit, let us worship God with our morning offering.

MUSIC

Our thanks to Bobbie Heron for sharing her voice with us today, and to Jonathan Dudley who is at the organ console today and next Sunday in the absence of Lyndon Woodside.

FOR: LARRY MORALES

BEFORE

"The Scripture Reading for today is taken from the
The Gospel of St. Luke. Chapter 15. Verses 11 - 24

It is found on page 909 in the Bible that is in the
pews."

After announcing the page number...pause for about
10 to 15 seconds...allowing people time to locate the scripture
in the Bible. People do like to follow along with the reader.

Thanks...

AFTER

"Thus ended the reading taken from the Holy Scripture.
May God add His blessing to the reading of His Word and to our
understanding of it.

Thanks be to God! Amen!

REMEMBER TO:

1. Go slowly...don't rush it...remember it's
The Word of God...don't read it
casually, and
2. Keep your voice up...smile...and remember
that Ada Kinney has to hear you 'way in
the back of the Church.

"DECLARE YOUR INTERDEPENDENCE"

A Sermon By

Philip A. C. Clarke

Park Avenue United Methodist Church
106 East 86th Street
New York, New York 10028
July 4, 1993

"DECLARE YOUR INTERDEPENDENCE"

INTRODUCTION

Today we celebrate our national day of independence - a pivotal holiday of the American people, given to patriotic speeches, fireworks and family outings. Cars by the millions are jamming the highways this weekend taking droves of us out to the parks and beaches, the lakes and the mountains. For many, it is a welcome mid-summer break from work.

I sometimes find myself wondering what philosophical or spiritual meaning it should hold for us. We know it's a celebration of the signing of the Declaration of Independence on July 4th, 1776. We mark it as a day on the calendar to pay tribute to freedom and independence, to think and to speak, to come and to go and to worship God as we choose. In a political sense, we realize that the original Declaration is still something to work for, something that hasn't happened yet for some people, and that with all we have achieved in the past 217 years there is still some growing and stretching to be done.

INTERDEPENDENT

For one thing, we need to remember that the Declaration of Independence was not the act of one individual, but rather it was a cooperative effort of some brave and visionary men. They well knew that if their cause failed they would be convicted of treason and put to death. One recalls those cautious and sobering words of Benjamin Franklin,

"We must all hang together, or we will all hang separately"

Although we celebrate our political independence this day, we must continue to realize that we are just as "inter-dependent" today as were those bold and brave patriots of 1776. Nobody is truly independent today. Nobody can really get along entirely by himself. On the contrary, we depend upon one another in these modern times more than human beings ever have in the past.

COOPERATION IS CALLED FOR

Cooperation is called for all around us. Therefore, give thought this day not so much to independence, but rather to interdependence.

Think of all those individuals who get us through a day with their labors: the South American coffee grower, the dairy farmer who provides the milk for our coffee and breakfast cereal; the bus driver or the subway motor man, the taxi driver, the policeman, the sanitation worker, the mailman, the telephone employer, the grocer, the barber, the beautician, the dressmaker, the doctor, the lawyer, the judge, the novelist, the entertainer, the poet, the cook, the teacher, the nurse. Were it not for these good and faithful folk and many others we would be as helpless as Robinson Crusoe when he first reached his little island - outcasts in a wilderness of confusion - because no person is really independent.

To me, there's nothing quite so sad as the person so independent by nature as to refuse the guidance or the love of those who offer help along the way. Man is born a helpless creature, totally in need of protection and nurture. Maturing a bit he aspires to independence. "I want to do it myself" the child often exclaims as he grows up. But that spirit can sometimes lead one off into the far country, as it were...as it did with the Prodigal Son...with thoughts of standing, walking, working - alone...completely alone.

Whereas in actuality no one has ever succeeded, in any endeavor, who has not been in some way dependent both upon the power of God within and upon the hands of others around him...contributing in ways both direct and indirect.

I think that when Jesus stressed, "Love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength" and "love your neighbor as yourself", He was dealing with what we term independence and interdependence.

MATURING PROCESS

I believe a person grows and matures in a spiritual sense as he or she grows in the realization that we must feed each other in life. Jesus once said, "I...if I be lifted up...will draw all men unto Me". You cannot have prosperity unless you help others to prosper. And you cannot have harmony unless you are willing to promote the harmony of the world.

This means that we must love God to establish a consciousness of "being within - dependent", and then love our neighbor to be interdependent. I believe that love is the key to freedom, to true independence. Turn on that switch of love for other people - for your work, all of your experiences, for life itself. Try to avoid from here on the mistake of simply tolerating people and putting up with them. We are able to love when we understand how much we need each other and how much we are interdependent, and when we learn to appreciate people for what they are and for what they do and not for what we can get out of them!

AN OLD TIBETIAN GREETING

Sometime back I came across an interesting greeting that comes to us from Tibet. I may have used this before. It begins with two people bowing to each other and extending their palms open - and stick out their tongues...indicating symbolically that there are no knives in their hands and no evil words on their tongues.

Certainly an interesting mode of greeting and I'm not suggesting that we acknowledge our friends in this unusual fashion, but you would certainly do well in practice to indicate that there is no malice in your intentions and no vicious words on your tongue.

When we realize the spirit of interdependence, we no longer let ourselves get out of tune with God...letting pride and egotism and willfulness take over. How grateful we are to friends and to associates and neighbors who are channels through which much of our good comes to us, and hopefully we are not so concerned as to who goes first or who gets all the credit. "Where there is love, there is no will to power" is a favorite expression to carry along with us.

VIOLIN STORY

You've heard the story of the willful violin who was very old and of great value and most conscious of that value. He often boasted to the other instruments in the orchestra that the great Stradivarius had made him and that if he wished he could produce the world's most beautiful music.

One day the violin's owner, so the story goes, was assigned to "second violin" in a series of orchestrations. The violin's pride was hurt and he angrily decided to teach everyone a lesson for not fully appreciating him by getting out of tune and staying that way. The music of the entire orchestra was spoiled and before long there was talk of letting the owner go and of his being sold to a second hand dealer. "See here" said the cello one day when the violin was acting his worst....