



"On the Four Pillars of Episcopal Belief, the Fourth of July, and Dobbs" A Message from Dusty Hecker, Warden

Fourth of July Greetings!

First, a huge shout out to Kevin Ruddy. His persistence and diligence have resulted in several parishioners agreeing to “buy” the excess electric credits our solar panel arrays have generated. We will be able to turn the existing credit balance into cash for the church and to generate revenues from future excess credits as they accrue. Thanks Kevin!

Now, to the Fourth. For me, the Fourth of July means many things. Time to watch Needham's great parade and to fly the American flag. Time to realize summer really is here but oh my gosh, only eight weeks remain before the real world intrudes again so we better get out and do something, anything before Labor Day ends the sojourn from the real world. Time (a bit guiltily) to install the dehumidifiers and window A/C units. Time to relax from the hustle and bustle of daily life and to disconnect from politics.

Politics, however, awaits the end of no holiday. The debates about contentious issues continue despite the better weather. To take one example, I honor the Fourth as the birth of our Nation. But should we, given so many alternative dates? On July 4, 1776, the Second Continental Congress approved the draft Declaration of Independence (written by the imperfect genius Thomas Jefferson and edited by other imperfect humans). Two days earlier, the Congress had taken the fateful - and potentially fatal - vote to declare independence from Great Britain. Which is more important, the act or the inspiring words explaining the act?

The end of the Revolutionary War could be another marker. But would that date be October 19, 1781, when Cornwallis surrendered to Washington and Lafayette (and a large French army and fleet) at Yorktown? Or September 3, 1783, when Great Britain accepted the Treaty of Paris?

The end of the Revolutionary War established the independence of thirteen separate political entities, not an entire, unified nation. The former colonies did not become part of THE United States until March 9, 1789. The Confederation Congress declared that date as when the new nation would begin operating under the new Constitution. Even then, two former colonies had not yet ratified the Constitution.

The Constitution as adopted did not contain sufficient guarantees the federal government could not infringe upon fundamental individual liberties or intrude on the “reserved” powers of the states in a federal system. The former, at least, came with the adoption,



effective December 15, 1791, of the first ten amendments to the Constitution, the Bill of Rights. It is hard to imagine “America” without the Bill of Rights.

Others have proposed when the Pilgrims landed in Massachusetts in 1620. They brought the Mayflower Compact, the first document to establish self-government in what would become the English colonies. Had the Native Americans who met the Pilgrims (or others then in North America) had a written language, that distinction would need to be qualified. Self-government already existed in 1620 in various forms and confederations throughout what we now call North America.

One year earlier, in August 1619, an English privateer ship landed in what is now Virginia. Its cargo included at least twenty or thirty enslaved Africans, captured from a Spanish slave ship. (Historical records are not clear whether they were considered slaves upon landing in Virginia, as many apparently later were set free as if they were indentured servants. One may even have started his own plantation, utilizing enslaved Africans.) The New York Times' *1619 Project* argues this was so fundamental as to mark THE date of America's founding. The “cargo” of human beings, none of whom chose to be enslaved, certainly considered the event to be significant. However, slavery then existed essentially everywhere and in all cultures and continued throughout the world for centuries later. And they, and probably essentially all the 400,000+ Africans who survived the Middle Passage and were landed in the US, likely were enslaved originally by fellow Africans.

If slavery is the defining character of America, why shouldn't our founding instead be one of the various dates in the late 1700's and early 1800's when many states outlawed slavery? In 1777, Vermont, then an independent republic, became the first sovereign entity -- in the world -- to abolish slavery. Or why not January 1, 1808, when, as long advocated by then President Jefferson, Congress abolished the slave trade? Or January 1, 1863, when Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation came into effect? Or April 9, 1865, when Lee surrendered to Grant at Appomattox Courthouse? That ended (almost) a war that destroyed slavery at the cost of 650,000 American lives, the equivalent of 6 or 7 million Americans today. Or June 19, 1865, Juneteenth, when a Union general issued an order implementing the Emancipation Proclamation in Texas, the last significant Confederate redoubt? Or the dates after the Civil War when the post-war amendments to the Constitution were ratified, ending slavery and paving the way for 150+ years of civil rights progress?

There are so many dates we could pick. I am comfortable with July 4 as a proxy for the other dates that others argue should be seen as our founding. All are important, and all are part of our shared history. I understand that others may disagree and believe that, for example, August 1619 or June 19, 1865, are more important. As an American and a Christian, I believe I must listen respectfully and (as hard as it may be) openly to arguments



with which I instinctively disagree. Above all, I should avoid dismissing persons who view complicated events differently than me as unworthy of being heard, of simply being bigoted or full of hate. They may well be those things. But we do not elevate the debate, nor are we really interested in persuasion if we see them as lesser human beings because their views do not accord with our own.

Which brings me to the reversal of *Roe v. Wade* and the reaction to the Supreme Court's decision in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*. Just when we thought we could slide into summer, a well-signaled political bombshell landed. What do we say about it and the people who issued and support the decision? Do we dismiss them as unworthy? Or do we listen to what they have to say? I believe that women should have access to safe and legal abortions, if necessary, throughout the USA. But is that right enshrined in the U.S. Constitution such that no state in our federal system has the power to restrict or even to eliminate abortion? That is a fundamentally different question.

For those who cheered the decision, I suggest you skim through the opinion of the three dissenting justices. For those who cannot understand the decision, I suggest you skim through Justice Kavanaugh's concurring opinion. I would have preferred that the Court had not reversed *Roe*. I am persuaded the individual liberty issues for the women involved are paramount, although not unlimited. Like what should be considered THE date on which America was founded, I also believe these are not easy issues.

People of good faith can differ whether a court or a legislature should decide how or even whether a woman may have an abortion. The fact six of nine justices of the Supreme Court concluded "the elected representatives of the people" should decide the questions does not make them or their supporters the devil incarnate. We do no one, including our body politic and our souls, any favors by suggesting they are.

When I was received into the Episcopal church (I grew up in a Congregational church), I was taught the four pillars of the Episcopal belief are scripture, reason, tradition, and experience. Let's not dispense with the second.

-Dusty