

O God, may you guide this country to be and to become the most real expression of your kingdom in this world. Amen.

The Enlightenment, according to Wikipedia, promoted a range of ideas centered on the pursuit of happiness, sovereignty of reason, the evidence of the senses as the primary sources of knowledge and advanced ideals such as liberty, progress, toleration, fraternity, constitutional government, and separation of church and state. Huh! It sounds like that could be an outline of our own Declaration of Independence, which was in fact written by some of the most “enlightened” people of the 18<sup>th</sup> c. They used the height of their reason and experience to craft what they hoped would be the best government ever and how exciting that must have been. What an opportunity. To start afresh, with a blank page and thousands of miles of wilderness. They couldn’t imagine any government more perfect, more advanced. And the Declaration of Independence and the ensuing Constitution are amazing and enlightened documents. They do represent probably the highest achievement of that period. But that period, like all periods in human history, had some good ideas and some serious shortcomings. For instance, if we hold that document up to the glaring light of today’s values of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion, there are some things we might take issue with. Only men are created equal? What about women and slaves? And how do we feel about the phrase “merciless Indian savages?” These are words that set our teeth on edge but they were unremarkable in their time. Hopefully, every humanity’s consciousness expands with time, so that every generation is both more just and more merciful. Hopefully every generation becomes more inclusive and is better at treating all people with dignity. That’s our task. And hopefully we have enough humility to know that our vision is also limited and that 100 years from now, people will look back on us and shake their heads in pity and wonderment at our lack of vision and consciousness. The bigger and more consequential point about the Declaration is that it was groundbreaking in its assertion of freedom for all and its refusal to tolerate tyranny and unfairness.

Charles Darwin developed the theory of evolution in the late 19<sup>th</sup> c which showed that over millions of years, all living things have changed and developed. Just as it has taken millions of years for us to develop physically, we have also been developing mentally and spiritually. A number of well known psychologists and writers – Lawrence Kohlberg, James Fowler, Jean Piaget have looked at the development of human beings over time. Along with their work are the insights of Ken Wilber, who combined their research into a book in which he looks at, among other things, humanity's level of consciousness over time. He uses the colors of the chakra system to describe humanity's consciousness at different points in history. Using this system, he begins at 50,000 years ago when humanity was at the magenta or lowest level of consciousness, which is generally referred to as the magic-animistic level. Since that time humanity's consciousness as a whole has moved up through the egocentric worldview to an ethnocentric worldview. In terms of chakra colors our current level of mindfulness corresponds, to roughly the orange to green levels, which means that we have ascended not even halfway up the ladder of consciousness. There are as many levels ahead of us as there are behind us. We, humanity, now generally operates at the level where tribalism is more persuasive than a broader more inclusive worldcentric view, and we are a long way from the unitive state where we can see and act upon the knowledge that all things are interrelated. So the good news we are moving in the right direction. The bad news is it takes a really long time, thousands of years, to inch up from one level to the next. I'm not saying this to discourage you but rather to illustrate how slow that lasting change is.

Today we're using the readings for Independence Day. As Tim Krueger pointed out at staff meeting, the nice thing about the gospel reading for today is that it reaches beyond our current level of development, characterized by tribalism, and calls us forth into the unitive mind, where Jesus encourages, commands us to love everyone,

not just our friends but even our enemies, equally.  
On this day when we might be tempted to focus on American exceptionalism or take pride in America being better than any other nation, the scripture reading is calling us to a much bigger worldview. Jesus' commandment, "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" doesn't mean being morally pure or never breaking any of Amy Vanderbilt's Rules of Etiquette. Perfection in this case means a higher level of consciousness, a level of completion or wholeness, where nothing is left out, everything belongs. A spiritual maturity. An end, a goal. The end that God intends for us.

A contemporary translation of this passage from Matthew puts it even better: "God gives his best – the sun to warm and the rain to nourish – to everyone, regardless, the and the bad. If all you do is love the lovable, do you expect a bonus? Anybody can do that. If you simply say hello to those who greet you, do you expect a medal? Any run-of-the-mill sinner does that. In a word, what I'm saying is, Grow up. You're Kingdom subjects. Now live like it. Live out your God-created identity. Live generously and graciously towards others, the way God lives toward you." *The Message*

The reason humanity is moving in the right direction, on an upwards trajectory of expanding consciousness is due to 2 things – the grace of God and our own actions. We have a crucial part to play. We are called to live with the discomfort and challenge of our growing edges, to look around and question what we see, to push for the values that we hold dear, to work for the things we care about. So by cooperating with God's grace we move forward to the *telos*, that end, that perfection, that God has intended for the universe from the beginning.