



**A Sermon preached in Christ Church, Grosse Pointe, Michigan
by The Reverend Andrew Van Culin, *Rector***

**The 4th Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 9, Year C)
3 July 2022**

In the Name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Fourth of July. It's a fun weekend. Tell me, what are the signs that it's 4th of July in our common life?

Fireworks. Summer. Flags. Picnics.

I've been thinking about berry trifles, the red, white, and blue trifles that you might see, yum. Or the flag cakes, yum. Or the strawberry pie. Hey, that just tells something about me, right?

There are signs all around us that 4th of July is fast approaching, and what a great thing it is for us as an American people. It reminds us, it draws all our attention to our identity, to the identity that we share as a nation and people. Just as a total aside, I was driving back last night from Petoskey, and I would say the entire ride, every 30 miles or so, I had a firework show. It was quite amazing. I saw one early on. I was like, "Oh, look at that." And then there was another. I was like, "Is it still going on?" Then I had fireworks on both sides of the car for one part. Another point, I could literally hear the fireworks in the car. It was crazy.

Anyhow, back to the 4th of July. It's this really amazing thing that we do as a nation that reminds us of who we are as a nation. And Paul, we read Paul in Galatians this morning, would say it means nothing. All of that well done America, Paul would say it means nothing. Hear this. For neither circumcision nor uncircumcision... For those who are following along, it's near to the last line of the passage from Galatians. If you've got your Bible out, its Galatians 6:15, I believe, is the verse number. For neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything.

Now, that doesn't fall on American ears in the 21st century with much meaning beyond this question about male circumcision or uncircumcision at an infant's birth, but in the ancient world, that would've



meant a great deal, for remember, that circumcision pointed to one's nationality, to one's ethnicity, and to one's religion. All three were tied up in that one statement. To be circumcised was to be Jewish, of ethnic descent of Abraham. To be uncircumcised was to be another ethnicity, to be not of the household and descendants of Abraham. It was ethnicity. It was religion to be circumcised, whether you were of Jewish heritage, or incorporated into the Jewish family, that is to be a Gentile who was circumcised and their family with them. It meant that you worshiped to the God of Israel. And so it was a religious identity, and it was a political identity, for we must remember that Judah and Israel were nation states alongside Rome and Assyria and Babylon and Egypt. To be circumcised or uncircumcised was to point to one's religion, ethnicity, and national identity. And Paul says it means nothing, for neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything.

There is something more fundamental, something more important to your identity, Paul reminds us, and it is this. May I never boast of anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. This alone matters to Paul. It's interesting. Paul claims a whole fourth identity, and it's actually a fifth identity, for some will point us back to our first identity as children of God, found in Genesis, that we are all made in the image of God. That is our first and true identity. But Paul, throughout his letters, reminds us that no, a new identity, a new creation, has been born. That that first creation, that creation that we have in Eve and Adam, which falls, which is broken, that is wrecked, as our wonderful gospel hymn just reminded us, that is wrecked over the course of time. That first identity has been supplanted by a new identity.

So five identities all wrapped up in today's reflection. Our identity as children of God in creation, fallen and broken, ethnic, religious, nation, all of which Paul says do not boast in. Boast solely in this identity, the identity you have in the cross of Christ. Now, what does that mean? Sadly, some Christians have said that that means become Christian. But we must understand in the context of this whole reading, that it's not about one's religious identity. It is actually about the identity, understanding that you and all people are redeemed by the love of God. It doesn't matter what religion, what ethnic nation you aspire to or proclaim. That what matters in our society, what matters in our identity, is that simple fact that you and I and all people are redeemed by the love of God in Christ.

When we come together on this 4th of July weekend, we are called and invited to celebrate that which binds us together as a nation. Wonderful, good, but Paul reminds us and invites us to celebrate something even grander, something even greater, something even more profound. That we are bound together, not only as a nation, that we are bound together with all people before the redeeming love of God in Christ our Savior. Amen.