

Around the Campfire  
 Luke 10:1-11, 16-20  
 July 4, 2010

One of my most vivid 4th of July memories was when I was an exchange student in Switzerland my senior year in high school. I was in language camp, before arriving at my host family's home. We went for a hike in the Jura Mountains, stopped for a picnic lunch. We sat on a hillside looking out into a beautiful valley and we sang songs together. I remember singing "The Battle Hymn of the Republic," and tears came to my eyes as we sang, "In the beauty of the lilies Christ was born across the sea." I felt homesick for the first time—away from my family and country on the 4th of July. We realized we were Americans in a foreign culture—proud of our heritage and a bit fearful about the experience that was to lie ahead. It turned out to be a wonderful year.

What is a memory of the 4th of July that comes to mind for you?

Jesse James told me about a memory: After World War II, in the beginning of the Cold War between Russia and the Allies, on June 24, 1948, the Russians severed all road and rail links to Western Berlin. By July 4 a major Berlin Airlift was underway, bringing 474 tons of food and supplies to the people of Berlin each day. By July 6, the amount was up to 995 tons. The Berlin Airlift was called "Operation Vittles," then "Little Vittles" started with a pilot giving Berlin children Wrigley's Doublemint Gum, promising to bring more if the children shared. They did, and then pilots started dropping chocolate. Jesse was one of the "Chocolate Fliers." The airlift continued for more than a year, ending August 1, 1949. There were 276,926 flights of the airlift to Berlin. Nearly 700 aircraft had logged over 124 million miles and delivered roughly 2.3 million tons of supplies. That's something to be proud of.

Sharing memories and songs.

I asked my daughter's friend about her memories of the 4th. She said one year she got up early to drive to Sausalito for the parade and celebration of the 4th there. As she was leaving Livermore at 7 am, there's an intersection that everyone refers to as "the flag pole." There she saw World War II veterans saluting the flag as it was raised in the downtown center of town. Something about these older men all reverently watching the flag rise up the pole at the crack of dawn touched her. She realized that patriotism was a bit passé. But at that moment she was proud to be an American. Whenever I see a flag at half-mast—like this week for Senator Byrd who died—I pause to remember the service given to our country that is represented by that flag. The Vietnam Memorial with a wall of names is a powerful tribute to allegiance and sacrifice.

Patriotism involves believing in and honoring the goodness of one's country. As citizens, we believe in the values of democracy. We believe in protecting the rights of the individual. As Christians we have an even higher moral standard. Our religious standard is more than protection of individual rights. The standard Christ gives us is to improve the common good. John Wesley's general rules are: Do no harm, do good, and stay in love with God. This is a summary of the Christian ethic.

Our scripture gives us a commission that asks more of us than our country asks. Jesus has appointed 70 and is sending them out in pairs. He describes the culture of the time as unfriendly—he calls the people out there "wolves." And says that his followers will have to dust off their shoes after visiting each home.

In a way, Jesus describes *our* times. People out there are not very interested in religion or ethics for the common good. Some say they are spiritual, but not religious.

We are called to be disciples—in John Wesley's words **to do no harm**. And we are asked **to do good**. That means doing more than the minimum. We are asked to do more than just coexist and tolerate one another. We are asked to LOVE one another.

And finally we are asked to obey the ordinances of God/ **stay in love with God**. We do this by the practice of our faith. By attending church, by taking communion, by giving to support the needs of the church and those who are less fortunate than we. We do this by prayer and fasting and thinking of others first. We do this by serving.

Jesus says, "The kingdom of God has come near." This is a message of hope. It is the hope that love can reign—it's a far greater challenge to bring about the reign of God, than to support the laws of the land. The laws of our land are good, and they are a beginning. But true freedom is more than freedom for the individual, or freedom just for Americans. When a Christian says, "Let freedom ring," true freedom is freedom for all of God's children. When we accept God's commission, we become citizens of the world and ambassadors of love. "Onward Christian soldiers" uses military language to promote the Christian mission. Our highest allegiance is to God and to love God and our neighbor as ourselves. The 4th of July celebrates Independence, but for us as people of faith, shouldn't it really be *interdependence* that we strive for? We are interdependent on God and one another. We are not just out for ourselves.

We are grateful for our country, but shouldn't we be challenged to be even more than good Americans? As Christians we are compelled to do more than defend our own rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. We are called to be followers of Jesus and live for a time when there truly is liberty and justice for all.