

**A Fair Balance, by Daniel H. Kuhn, Jr.**  
**2 Samuel 1:17-27 and 2 Corinthians 8:7-15**  
**Elon Community Church, United Church of Christ.**  
**July 2, 2006**

One of my favorite traditions is to drive to the north end of Owasco Lake to Auburn, NY, to Emerson Park on the evening of July 3. There, we pull the folding camp chairs out of the back of the van and set them up for a picnic in front of the Nineteenth Century Victorian white pavilion. We are there along with hundreds of other families, old and young, well-bred and rude. The Syracuse Symphony Orchestra plays its annual Fourth of July concert with its program of patriotic tunes and music of American composers. With the final notes of John Philip Sousa's "Stars and Strips Forever" echoing off the hills around the lake, we turn around and ooh and aah at the twenty minute fireworks extravaganza.

We have such fireworks to celebrate the birth of this nation on July 4, 1776 when the Declaration of Independence was signed in Philadelphia the Second Continental Congress. That new nation was an experiment in democracy, justice and equality.

The second paragraph of the Declaration contains these familiar words: "we hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and pursuit of Happiness." The Declaration declares a fair balance among all people, although the original intended "men" to mean the landed gentry: land-owning white males.

The meaning of "men" in 1776 has grown through the years to include first, non-landowners, then former slaves and non-whites, and finally, women. We still struggle to insure that the balance includes all people regardless of age, sexual orientation, or economic income level.

There are some who have a difficult time distinguishing between the United States and the Christian faith. The United States has been called the "New Israel" and "The New Promised Land". There are many politicians who capitalize on the blurred boundary between church and state. There are also many clergy and churches who parlay patriotic preaching into profits for their parishes and personal pockets. That boundary between church and state must be kept clear and distinct. Parades and pyrotechnics become processions and sacraments of civil religion. The Declaration of Independence and the Constitution become Holy Scripture. But Civil religion is not the Christian religion.

We worship the God of all nations and people. I love the United States. I am fortunate to have been born here. I would rather be a citizen of this country than any other in the world, and I have been to twenty other countries that I can count. But, I do not worship the United States. I pledge allegiance to its flag, but the flag is not sacred. It is a symbol and it stands for a republic, a people and a dream, a dream not yet fully realized.

Our Christian faith gives us a needed perspective on our nation. It serves as a balance both to our patriotism and to our complaining about government. As I read Second Corinthians, I was haunted by Paul's words about a question of a fair balance between one group's abundance and another group's need. Paul moved toward the ideal: "The one who had much did not have too much, and the one who had little did not have too little".

As I read those words, and I remember other words about being created equal, I wonder. I wonder about the proportion of African-American prisoners in our jails when compared to the proportion of African-Americans in the total population. Is it because some are too poor to pay for an adequate legal defense?

I wonder about the growing salary gap between wage earners and top company executives. Don't chief executive officers of corporations have too much when they are paid in the millions of dollars each year while the minimum wage for their workers is not enough to support a family? Try living on \$10,000 a year.

I wonder about the balance of supplies between rich and poor schools. I wonder about the ability of the wealthy to have the attention of state and federal legislators. Does one group have too much power and others too little? Would our society be more just and peaceful if there were a fair balance of power? Remember that John Hancock, Thomas Jefferson, Ben Franklin and John Adams felt compelled to declare the independence of the colonies from Great Britain, not independence from one another.

Let us look as Christians at a phrase in the Declaration. "He (George III) has refused his Assent to Laws, the most wholesome and necessary for the public Good". In other words, colonial leaders wanted George to make more laws and he was unwilling.

The "public Good" is a concept understood to be at the foundation of a free society. The public Good is more important than individual freedom. The public Good is more important than the wealth or power of individuals. The public good is more important than an individual's ownership of a wetland. The public good is more important than a corporation's right to make a profit. In short, individual freedom is only as good as what is good for the public.

Katherine Lee Bates wrote, "O beautiful for heroes proved in liberating strife, Who more than self their country loved and mercy more than life". There is a balance between the importance of the individual and the importance of the public.

The passage from Second Corinthians is really a passage about stewardship. Stewardship is the concept of taking care of that which belongs to another. All that we have really does not belong to us, it belongs to God. For those who don't believe in God, think of it this way: all that we have belongs to future generations. None of us gets out of this world alive. We came in with nothing, and we will leave with nothing. What we have, we have only as a trust during the short time we are here! That is stewardship. Paul was appealing to the believers of Corinth to raise money to support the needy in Jerusalem, a hundred miles away. In the interest of community, Paul was looking for a balance between the abundance of the Corinthians and the poverty of the Judeans. He was talking about the sharing of resources, sort of like a welfare system. He said, "I do not mean that there should be relief from others and pressure on you, but it is a question of a fair balance". He said we should remember the example of Jesus, who though he was rich, he became poor for our sakes.

We have abundance. You and I, no matter how much we complain about taxes and gas prices, have abundance. This nation is an abundant nation. "From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required". We have a responsibility as Christians and as Americans to do what we can to bring about a fair balance in resources and opportunities for all. Our happiness comes not in acquiring more, but in realizing that we have in abundance.

We have enough! "America! American" God mend thine every flaw, confirm they soul in self control, thy liberty in law.

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