

Independence Day
July 4, 2014
The Rev. Robert H. Malm

The Common Good

Jim Wallis is at it again! Don't recognize the name? A quick glance at Wikipedia will tell us that Wallis is a "Christian writer and political activist ... best known as the founder and editor of Sojourners' Magazine and the Sojourners' Community in 1971 ..." Reading on, we find that he has been arrested 22 times for civil disobedience and that he has written a number of books. Some consider Wallis to be on the "evangelical left" whatever that means. I didn't realize there is an evangelical left or right!

Two of his books have very intriguing titles:

- *God's Politics: Why the right gets it wrong and the left doesn't get it* (2005)
- *On God's Side: What religion forgets and politics hasn't learned* (2012)

A week or so ago I saw Wallis on a morning news talk show speaking about the immigration issue and, of course, promoting his new book, *The (Un)Common Good: How the Gospel brings hope to a world divided*. We are celebrating today, the 4th of July, because the Gospel brings hope to a world divided. The world was divided when this nation was founded and the Gospel brought hope. Listen again to the words that begin the Collect for today. "*Lord God Almighty, in whose Name the founders of this country won liberty for themselves and for us ...*" (BCP, p. 190)

The title of Wallis' new book, *The (Un)Common Good*, reminded me to return to the prologue to our Constitution. I asked my very-recently-graduated-from-college son if he knew any of the words to this prologue, and James said, "No." I suggested to him that he should get a copy of this sermon and study these words, maybe begin each day with them and the Lord's Prayer.

"We the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution ..."

God is not mentioned, but the principles of God's Kingdom are behind every word. This nation was established as a Christian nation. Sure, there were political, economic and social reasons for our revolution. Yet the Pilgrims, the Puritans, those from the Church of England, later Roman Catholics and every religious group since, including Jews and Moslems and many other non-Christian faiths have come to America seeking freedom – freedom to worship God as they know God.

Recently, I read a book about the Salem witch trials in the late 17th century. *The Heretic's Daughter* tells the story of how religious zealots persecuted, arrested and executed their victims. It's hard to believe this could ever happen in this land.

Martin Luther King, Jr., wrote a letter to pastors and churches while he sat in the Birmingham, Alabama, jail. King pleaded with Christian leaders and communities to help with the Civil Rights movement. It's hard to believe Christians in this nation could support slavery or deny women the right to vote.

We have come a long way but, in many places around the world, Christians are being persecuted and executed. There's a stunning silence from our political and religious leaders about this. One recent editorial in the *Wall St. Journal* describes "The West's cultured classes' hostility to Christianity ... that ... results in a passivity that tolerates attacks on people whose only crime is their faith ..." ¹ The author describes the persecution of a 27-year-old woman from the South Sudan and draws a parallel to 3rd century Rome and the torture and execution of Christians.

I hope on this national holiday we might give thanks for our freedom, but also give thanks to God and do all we can to help others remember how we got here and why so many have wanted to come here. I hope we can look to the teachings of Jesus, especially the Sermon on the Mount, and remember the words from today's Gospel, "*Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect ...*"

As we strive for a more "perfect union" in our nation, we must look at how we treat those who oppose us, our enemies. We need to consider how we respond to those who don't agree with us. How do we live in conflicted relationships? How can we work for the common good? Diversity, debate and disagreement make democracy a very challenging political system. Yet we believe democracy can help us to achieve the common good and a more perfect union. May Christ continue to guide us and may we always turn to Jesus for direction and support.

Hebrews 11:8-16
Matthew 5:43-48

¹ Meriam Ibrahim and the Persecution of Christians, *Wall St. Journal*, June 17, 2014.

The common good is an important concept in political philosophy because it plays a central role in philosophical reflection about the public and private dimensions of social life. Let's say that "public life" in a political community consists of a shared effort among members to maintain certain facilities for the sake of common interests. "Private life" consists of each member's pursuit of a distinct set of personal projects.