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Back in college, while others were studying political science and international politics, I was studying music theory and religion - -which sound rather other-worldly and esoteric next to each other, don't they? Obviously not a politician or expert commentator, even I realize that the 4th of July when our ancestors declared themselves independent of Britain & the rule of that monarchy, was not only an important day for us in the U.S., but also was a huge step towards the end of a whole era of colonialism by European countries.

I like to think that the growth of Christianity carried its ethics with it as it spread – those qualities of right-relatedness, of justice and of equality, the words of the prophets from Judaism about national responsibility for the poor and powerless. I like to think that these Biblical values seeped into people's consciousness even under different political systems and different forms of government; and eventually formed the basis of the new governmental system that emerged with our country's formation.

When we make a timeline of world events, we see that the founding of our country happened in the wake of the whole Reformation; and we Presbyterians like to think that those ancestors who gathered to design our democracy were influenced by our Presbyterian design. There were 11 Presbyterians who signed our Declaration of Independence, including 1 clergyperson, John Witherspoon; so Presbyterians were there. Our denomination had organized itself with electing elders from within the congregation to sit in Session and decide matters for us; **then** each congregation sent an elder with their minister to local Presbytery meetings; **then** each presbytery sent representatives annually to both a regional Synod and a national General Assembly. Presbyterians like to think that our American government was “creatively borrowed” from us.

The independence that we celebrate today is, of course, a political concept, referring to our becoming self-governing. Our national fascination with independence, however, seems to have carried the concept into other lines as well, like a personality trait – the rugged individualist, the frontier folks in covered wagons, or pioneers. We claim to value independent thinking, free thinkers, inventors, innovators – although it could be argued that these traits are

actually valued after the person is gone – during their lives, they are often looked at askance. In extreme cases, we have the independent militia folks with weapons stockpiled in their basements.

I think this kind of valuing of independence has led us to forget a value that is actually being rediscovered lately – that value of interdependence. Different from independence, which values being separate, interdependence recognizes how all of humanity and all of nature are related, and values that particular wisdom that grows from that understanding. Sometimes we've taken that independent value too far, and have grown to think that we live in a kind of separate vacuum – that human life is separate from all other life, for example; or that our nation exists apart from other nations; or on a personal level, that I don't need other people.

A recent movie titled itself after a concept called “the butterfly effect,” which actually came out of chaos theory (and in saying that I've exhausted my knowledge of chaos theory) – it's a metaphor for the way that small differences may produce large variations in the long term behavior of the system. In 1972, Philip Merilees titled a paper, *Does the flap of a butterfly's wings in Brazil set off a tornado in Texas?* And there it is. Small changes in one part lead to major changes in the larger part.

And it's because all of creation is interdependent. Things make ripples that go who knows how far, because it all connects. I used to laugh at my mom's thought that all our airplanes and space shots disturbed the atmosphere and made storms worse. But maybe we just haven't caught up to her yet. Who knows? When we think about it, it's self-evident that things like the oil disaster on the Gulf coast will impact us here in MO, whether it be people migrating for jobs, or a steep rise in seafood prices and gas prices, or the loss of some species because of habitat damage, or the displacement of relatives who live there. A rise in the normal ocean temperature effects wind conditions which effects hurricane formation and intensity. Cutting rainforests makes that land return to desert, and changes the climate. Even if you debate the fact of global warming coming from more and more industrialization, there's no arguing that glaciers are melting at increasing rates from something – pictures and data prove it. Scandinavian countries are already preparing for the effects of changing shorelines and rising water on their populations. When I moved here last fall, I asked someone, were those really armadillos I saw beside the road? Yes, they've been migrated up here from Texas. Things are all connected.

According to the Bible, people are all connected, too. Nations are criticized by the Hebrew prophets because they ignore the plight of the lowly and powerless among them – God considers this disregard to be a cause for judgment. We are charged in Galatians to work for the good of all, because all are equally valuable in God’s eyes; and right-relatedness, shalom, or righteousness consists of loving our neighbor as ourselves – and Jesus is quite pointed in that our neighbor is anyone in need. Way back in 1944, the national PTA chose the theme “All Children Are Our Children” for its conference, where Eleanor Roosevelt was the main speaker. It’s been a slogan for a group called Children First which has been working across the country for recognizing that the whole community has an impact on children’s development.

The Great Law of the Iroquois was to consider the impact of any decision on the seven generations to come. Sometimes I think we’ve taken this independence concept too far, thinking only about the immediate moment, the quarterly profit, the impact on our own selves, or what effect it will have on the media attention we get - - - short-term things like this. That’s not working – it’s gotten us into trouble. I pray for more truly wise elders who know how to think about the seven generations – our grandchildren and great-grandchildren for generations to come.

On this Independence Day in 2010, I propose that we best serve God – and our nation – by deciding that we will be those wise elders who, while able to celebrate the independence that created our nation and its history, also recognize our interdependence with all people, all creation, and all generations to come. I pray that God will raise up leaders who are long-sighted and courageous, who struggle with balancing the good now with the good to come, who hold up for us a vision that will carry us past the current market-share type thinking and into the seven generation type thinking. I pray for people of faith, Christians, to be leaders in a renewed wisdom based on what we know of God, being all made one in Christ Jesus, following in the steps of the one who set aside the glory due to him in order to identify with common humanity; and that instead of being caricatured as wild-eyed Bible thumpers who hate abortions, gays and liberals equally, Christians will be known for our passion for all people, for justice, for right-relatedness, for wisdom and caring that go beyond just ourselves. I pray that we hear the vision of faith which is deep and wide, like we sang in Sunday School; which knows this creation is all of God; which knows that God so loved the world; which knows that we are all in this together;

which knows that God sees not as we see, but into the heart, and calls us to live abundantly.
May it be so. AMEN.