

Yesterday was the 4th of July and was celebrated as Independence Day

The storybook version of our beginnings romanticizes our beginnings of "discovering" America
Telling the tale of Pilgrims coming to America on the Mayflower in search of religious freedom
And of others that followed, such as the Puritans and Quakers
Creating America, founded on freedom of religion

However, that idealistic view denies the reality

For most, freedom of religion meant freedom for my religion at the exclusion of all others
The established religion of New England was Puritan and there was no religious freedom
In Boston, 4 Quakers were hanged for defying a Puritan law banning Quakers
Some other colonies, including Pennsylvania were more tolerant, however prejudice remained

Rather than our cherished ideal of being founded on freedom—America has a tarnished past
We were founded on violence, oppression, and war—all of which raise their heads today
Initially we fantasized that we were settling unsettled country in coming to America—discovery
Not honoring those whom we displaced
While we tell stories of early settlers, the Natives tell stories of violation
Columbus Day, Thanksgiving, and 4th of July are all painful reminders of our aggression
Not only did we violate the Natives that lived here for centuries before us, we took their land
We methodically and violently shoved Natives onto reservations, killing many
In addition, we participated in the slave trade—treating people as commodities to be owned
Systematically kidnapping Africans and bringing them to America to be slaves
The very founding of America as a nation was based on war with the American Revolution
America established its independence through the violence of war

These acts of violence, oppression, and war are in the very DNA of the creation of America
DNA that we see acting out today...

The killing of 9 black lives while they met for worship, inviting a stranger to join them
The burning of 7 black churches—too many to be accidental
The aggression of white police forces against black neighborhoods
In 2009 an apology to Native Americans was passed by Congress and signed by Obama
But it was buried in an appropriations bill—how many of us knew about it?
The Washington Redskins NFL Football team refuses to change their name
Even though Natives are offended by their adamant use of a racist name
The current animosity and spite towards immigrants when we are all immigrants
The willingness to solve international issues through war and violence
Afghanistan, Iraq, Lybia, Syria, etc.
Our persistent belief in the "myth of redemptive violence" as the answer
The DNA of our beginnings continues to play out in our country today—but it doesn't have to

We pride ourselves on the progress of the civil rights movement and equality

Declaration of Independence—all men are created equal
Yet 30 lines later, it refers to Native Americans as "merciless Indian savages"

9 days ago the Supreme Court ruled that same-sex marriage was legal

While many rise up in anger, justifying it as righteous anger
We must respond in love and grace as Jesus did
This is true no matter what we believe

How do we change? If this is our DNA, can it change?

I say we need a "stem cell transplant" of our DNA—a healing and transformation by God's grace
Christianity has long put the emphasis on personal conversion and transformation
Yet, I am convinced that nations, communities, systems, empires, organizations can be changed
Christ is reconciling the world—and has called us to be God's agents of reconciliation
As I've said before—we have to start with telling the truth

Georges Erasmus, an Aboriginal leader from Canada, said, "Where common memory is lacking, where people do not share in the same past, there can be no real community. Where community is to be formed, common memory must be created."¹

In order to bring healing, we must tell the truth—a shared truth bearing witness to the truth of others
After years of apartheid, South Africa brought healing through the Truth Commission
We must do the same

We lament the atrocities done in our name—

Both to the Natives in this country and to those kidnapped from Africa as slaves
To the generations held as slaves and families that were violently separated and sold
To immigrants—Latinos and those from all countries who come here
The violence of war enacted against other countries killing people on our behalf
The torture done in our name²

We ask forgiveness for our nation

We commit to telling the truth for all peoples

We commit to telling both the good and bad stories from our history
Whitewashing our history hurts us as much as anyone slighted in the retelling
When confronted, our natural reactions are to defend ourselves,
rather than to hear what is being said and meet it with the honest truth

John 8:32 – "you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free"

God can work inside the truth—and therein begins our journey to freedom

It seems to me that North Seattle Friends is being called to reconciliation

Our journey begins with truth telling—our own stories and our collective stories
With honoring one another and a commitment to Listen deeply
A willingness to hear the pain of another and not rush through it
A commitment to stay together and walk with each other step by step
A recognition that only together will we find the way forward that answers our hearts

Rather than a declaration of independence, maybe we celebrate a declaration of interdependence

¹ See http://wirelesshogan.blogspot.com/2015/06/the-dilemma-of-fourth-of-july_11.html?m=1

² Minute affirmed by North Seattle Friends Church, December 2014—

The scope and reality of the United States' torture of detainees is now clear and undeniable.
We are anguished and humbly repent for the sins that were done on our behalf and in our name.

Torture is wrong.

It is a sin against God.

It is a sin against the humanity of those being tortured and those doing the torture.

We ask forgiveness for our nation.