

In Luke 10, Jesus sent out 72 devout followers, likely both men and women, sent two by two, to scattered areas on his way to Jerusalem, they were to go peacefully, seeking a reception for the message that the Kingdom of Heaven has come near, and Jesus has shown us the way, the teaching of the kingdom. By performing miracles of healing just as the disciples and Jesus had done, many more came to believe and follow the way, the truth and the life of Jesus. It made it easier for Jesus to gain a hearing in these places, and build on what they had done. In as sense small gatherings became an enclave or small community of followers in each place.

JESUS had them avoid those places that were already known to reject the message. Thus, they avoided conflict as much as possible.

The 72 were sent out as sheep among wolves, knowing the dangers of those who opposed Jesus and his followers. Yet they all returned after they had accomplished their teaching and healing in varied towns.

They were specifically instructed to go into the town peaceably, and accept the hospitality of food and lodging of the first house that offered it, so as not to waste time, or offend any one that perhaps would think that one house had given a better reception than the other. They were to eat whatever offered. Not to be picky.

Why 72? We don't really know, some think the number was chosen as the same number of men at the base of the mountain when Moses returned with the ten commandments, others feel it represented the number of known countries in the world referred to in Genesis, indicating the gospel was to go to the whole world, and others suggest it is the same number as the Jewish Council in the Sanhedrin. Certainly they were represented by men and women that were close followers of Jesus. They were empowered by Jesus to be able to cast out demons in the course of doing healings, doing miracles that would open the eyes of those in these places and gain more followers of Jesus and his ministry of teaching about the

Kingdom of Heaven come near, forming small enclaves of communities of followers, which later morphed into the early church as they learned from the Apostles sent out after Jesus crucifixion, death and resurrection that this Jesus was indeed the Son of God and the Lord of Lords and Savior of the world.

So we see the Church's one foundation is Jesus Christ her Lord.

As we celebrate the birth of our nation tomorrow commemorating the Declaration of Independence and later the constitution that united the colonies as one — the United States of America, it came to me that this country came together with small groups of men, sharing the same thoughts and values, and established something unique as the culture embraced these beliefs.

Think for a moment on the basic meaning of community. It is generally held that a group of men or women sharing like values makes a community. A value system that extends beyond the usual confines of family or loved ones usually formed the basis for a community. These were more often than not defined by a common place or defined geography. Community gave rise to culture. As things progressed, representatives gathered to determine laws and systems to maintain that culture, and a nation formed and ongoing changes developed with differences having to be worked out. Ultimately throughout the years there are changes in the mix that influences the culture.

As the Christian church has endured through the ages, it is only by clinging to the basic tenants of the faith, amidst varied factions and differences that God has held it together. We state these things weekly as a reminder to us, The Apostles Creed or the Nicene Creed have summarized these things. The belief that all Scripture is the inspired word of God for our teaching and admonition gives us reason to continue to tell that old old story that we are saved by grace through faith in the finished work of Jesus on the cross. That whosoever believes in him, might be saved, and inherit eternal life.

Let us pray for the strengthening of the Christian church's message in a pluralistic religious society where freedom to practice our religion was the key principle that influenced the migration of those men who formed the first thirteen colonies here. May our message of the love of God for the whole world continue to be lived out in each one of us, so that others will continue to see that we are defined by our love of God and our love for each other.

Let us pray for this nation as we pause to reflect on the values and principles that were visionary. "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 the pursuit of Happiness."

Amidst increasing diversity, and division, we recall Abraham Lincoln's warning that a nation divided against itself can not stand. We pray that we would continue to work towards solutions to our country's injustices, and strive for peaceful coexistence and unity based on the foundational principles of this nation, that we may continue to proudly raise the stars and stripes as we celebrate our independence each July fourth.