Holy Wisdom, You continually call us to Yourself. Teach us Your ways, that we might see how to love and serve the world You have made. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be always acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

On this stormy weekend, we've been celebrating the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence in 1776. Every year on July 4th, fireworks glamorize the artillery shells that exploded in the Revolutionary War as colonists fought to throw off the yoke of British rule. Crowds cheer, children wave tiny American flags, and newscasters practically sing their scripts about the "birth of democracy." But this is a contested event—this holiday—because of the grim history of political elites in the United States authorizing the enslavement of human beings and the dispossession of indigenous peoples on these lands. Already in the 1500s, Spanish settlers had trafficked enslaved Africans to Florida. From 1619 on, American colonists subjected what became millions of enslaved Africans to carceral labor and unthinkable atrocities. They also forcibly displaced Native tribes, which as of today have lost more than 98% of their ancestral holdings.

"All … are created equal" and are "entitled to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness," the Declaration of Independence says. Beautiful principles, worthy of celebration! But to many who study our current policies, "Independence Day" is an ironic misnomer that obscures the inequities on which the government of the United States was founded, consequences of which are felt to this day.

I know—I could have just said, "Happy 4th!" But this is a complex day of remembrance, and as Christians, we are called to bear witness to the whole truth. Now, I personally am not unhappy that the British empire no longer rules over this territory.[1] British imperialism has done terrible things across several continents. But I also deplore other "repeated injuries and usurpations," to use the language of the Preamble to our Constitution—injuries and usurpations that we have inflicted, egregiously, in our own history. I lament the horrors of slavery and Jim Crow, the disenfranchisement of Native groups, the "absolute tyranny" of capitalistic greed, and the exported wars and extractive technologies that cause such enormous suffering and intensify ecological fragility across the globe.

So this morning, I invite you to embrace a Declaration of Interdependence—yes, interdependence, advocated by ecological activists such as Robin Wall Kimmerer, who wrote the wonderful book *Braiding Sweetgrass*.[2]

Interdependence means living in gentle mutuality with other living beings, focusing on enhancing the flourishing of communities and entire regions. Interdependence means using our creativity and ingenuity to foster compassion, solidarity, and empathy, for humans and for other species, seeing all as kin in the web of life. It's very Beatitudes, very much in the spirit of Matthew's Gospel: surrendering the power to exploit and dominate, we learn to trust the rich blessings Jesus promises for all who choose lifeways of mercy and peace.

Interdependence: it's in the Bible![3] In our Gospel lesson, Jesus speaks in the voice of holy Wisdom[4] when he says, "Come to me, all you who are weary and are carrying heavy burdens. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me."[5] The "yoke" of Wisdom is a beautiful feature of Jewish tradition as early as the book of Sirach, written two centuries before the time of Jesus. There, Wisdom invites believers to study the Torah, which "overflows … with wisdom," "[pouring] forth instruction" deeper than the ocean, so that our understanding "shines forth like the dawn"! Wisdom urges that we "study the law of the Most High" to learn to live in harmony and peace, avoiding hatred, boasting, vengefulness, wrath, and bitterness.[6] The wise are "like a rose," Wisdom says, "growing by a stream of water, [sending] out fragrance like incense" and "[blossoming] like a lily" as we study the ways of our Creator, whose "blessing covers the dry land like a river, and drenches it like a flood."[7]

Wisdom teaches interdependence. Sirach says all creation is radiant with God's glory, every creature has been made for a specific purpose, and—this is important—every living thing "supplements the virtues of" other living things. Sir 42:25 We live in an interdependent ecosystem that displays the glory of God! Read Proverbs 8 and the book of Job to see more about the living meshwork of creation in which we live and through which we glorify our Creator. To live in wisdom and serenity, we should take on the yoke of Wisdom, rejoicing in God's compassion Sir

51:26, 29 and delighting in the intricate beauty and purposefulness of all living creatures.

Interdependence is at the heart of wise discipleship. We follow Jesus Christ, and he is light and life—not just to us but to all that lives, to everything that draws breath, to all that has ever existed since the dawn of time! In Christ "all things in heaven and on earth were created,"—this is Colossians 1:16—and "all things have been created through him and for him." The author of the Gospel of John teaches that Jesus the divine Word was "in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life" John 1:2–4 —life itself! That theology is very close to what we hear in our Matthew passage today about Jesus as Wisdom.[8] In our Matthew passage, Jesus is the Divine Wisdom through which all creation came into being![9]

Following Jesus, then, we learn how to love all that Jesus loves—all of creation! Coming to Jesus in prayer, in Scripture study, and in the Eucharist, we learn to work for the healing of all that he has healed and is healing. We learn to give ourselves, heart, soul, mind, and strength, to loving God and loving every neighbor: every living being proximate to us, all the creatures that play and struggle and raise their young, every creature that sings or chirps or roars, all the beings that swim and gallop and soar through their grace-filled lives on this Earth!

And so, friends, love as Christ loves! Heal what is wounded; grieve what has been lost; resist what is death-dealing; practice compassion; and foster empathy for all living beings. For the love of God, nurture the interdependence of your community and this country and the planet!

And when you get tired,

when the rhetoric of division poisons our common life
and the suffering of this planet overwhelms you,
when the demands of empathy and justice seem too hard
and you love the work but find yourself exhausted,

listen for Christ's voice.

He is calling you now, in this very moment!

"Come to me, all you who are weary and are carrying heavy burdens,
and I will give you rest.
Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me;
for I am gentle and humble in heart,
and you will find rest for your souls."

Listen, and learn, and rest in our Savior. That's all we need to do!

And so, happy 5th! I wish you a glorious Interdependence Day, in the Name of the One to whom "all authority in heaven and earth" has been given Matt 28:18:

Jesus Christ, to whom be honor, glory, and praise, now and forever. Amen.

The Rev. Dr. Carolyn J. Sharp

5 July 2026

Proper 9A

Zech 9:9–12; Ps 145:8–15; Rom 7:15–25a; Matt 11:16–19, 25–30

Preached at St. Thomas's Episcopal Church, New Haven, Connecticut

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[1] I find risible the arrogance of British imperialism. I hasten to underscore that the misbegotten ideologies of "Manifest Destiny" and American exceptionalism appall me as well. Horrific violence has been done in the name of those perspectives.

[2] On 3 July 2026, a reel was posted on Instagram by Robin Wall Kimmerer and several partners advocating an ecological Declaration of Interdependence. You can find it on Instagram by searching the accounts of atmos, interdependence.everyday, plantbabyplantmvmt, and wildrplaces, as well as www.robinwallkimmerer.com. For many decades, feminist, womanist, and ecological thinkers have promoted an ethical commitment to interdependence and mutuality as essential for justice and the flourishing of all life.

[3] "It's in the Bible!" The book of Sirach (Ecclesiasticus) is considered Scripture by Roman Catholic believers. As intertestamental literature, it is not in the Hebrew Bible and thus not in Protestant Bibles.

[4] That our passage is saturated with Wisdom imagery has been recognized by interpreters at least since the medieval period. Ian Boxall notes that Dominican theologian Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274) perceived the link between Jesus's words in Matt 11:28–30 with Wisdom traditions; see Boxall, *Matthew Through the Centuries*, Wiley Blackwell Bible Commentaries (Wiley Blackwell, 2019), 189. For contemporary scholarship on this, see Matthias Konradt, "'Take My Yoke upon You and Learn from Me!' (Matt 11.29): Matthew 11.28–30 and the Christological Dimension of Matthean Ethics," pp. 159–185 in his *Christology, Torah, and Ethics in the Gospel of Matthew*, trans. Wayne Coppins (Baylor University Press, 2022), esp. 159–167. Some Christian interpreters have interpreted Christ's yoke as the divine grace that displaces the heavy burden of sin. Hilary of Poitiers (ca. 310–ca. 367) seems to understand Christ's yoke, to include the taking up of one's cross per Matt 16:24, as a means of ethical formation: Believers "ought to accept the teaching of his commandments and come to him through the mystery of his cross," taking on his yoke and burden, because "by these … we desire to do good, we refuse to do evil, we love all people, we hate no one, we attain eternity. We are not infatuated

with the present times; we are unwilling to bring upon another the trouble which we ourselves would not wish to endure" (*Commentary on Matthew*, trans. D. H. Williams, FC 125 [Catholic University of America Press, 2012], 137). Socially oriented commentators have seen Christ's yoke as compassionate divine care that can lighten the burden of our exhaustion and anxiety.

[5] See Sir 6:18–19, 24–31; 24:19–34.

[6] Cf. Sir 25:1, 2, 8, 15; 38:34; and *passim*.

[7] Sir 39:13–22. For more wisdom traditions from antiquity that link creation to theology and believers' spiritual formation, read Sir 42:15–43:33; Psalms 8, 19, 104, 148; and many passages in Job, including Job 38–39.

[8] Matthew 11:27, "no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal [the Father]," has been called by some scholars a "Johannine thunderbolt" (Boxall) striking into the Gospel of Matthew. On the Johannine tenor of Matt 11:27 (compare John 10:15; 14:7–11), see Boxall, *Matthew Through the Centuries*, 188; Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 8–20*, trans. James E. Crouch, Hermeneia (Fortress, 2001), 167; Walter T. Wilson, *The Gospel of Matthew, Vol. 1: Matthew 1–13*, Eerdmans Critical Commentary (Eerdmans, 2022), 404.

[9] I agree with Walter Wilson: "In the Matthean context, ζυγός [yoke] represents the practical demand Jesus makes on his followers by virtue of his authority as sole mediator of divine knowledge…. He functions not as a teacher of wisdom (cf. 9:11; 12:38) but as Wisdom itself" (*Gospel of Matthew* 1:405–406). Noting, as most commentators do, the close linkage with Sirach 51, Wilson offers, "An important difference between Sirach and Matthew is that the fictive household group forming around Jesus establishes relationships through which its members not only receive instruction but also experience compassion, the expression 'meek and humble in heart' having no counterpart in Sir 51:13–30" (406–407).