

Declaration of Dependence
July 5, 2009
Lois Hildenbrand, CLP

I want to do it my own self....NOOOOOO, I want to do it my OWN self! Anyone who's tried to help a toddler open a door, turn on a faucet, stir a cake mix or squirt catsup on a hamburger has heard a version of that statement. It's part of the process of growing up for a child. It's how they begin to assert their independence. It's hardwired into child development.

I still struggle with that childish independence streak. Often when I arrive here on a weekday I'm encumbered with my motorcycle helmet, a package of pasta, shoes to change into, a book or two and my lunch. If someone asks, "Can I get the door for you?" It's not unusual to hear me say, "Oh no thanks, I can get it". Really, it's just silly! But there's something in me that wants to be able to take care of myself without help from anyone else. Maybe that's why I'm so comfortable in Alaska. We ARE an independent sort, you know.

But wait, Alaskans are not alone in their independence. As a nation we celebrate our independence every year. Yesterday we celebrated our 233rd year of independence from Britain with Pancake feeds, parades, fireworks and cookouts. We Americans enjoy our independence. Now, if we would only recognize our DE-pendence on God as the signers of our Declaration of Independence did. The last line of the Declaration of Independence reads, "And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of Divine Providence, we mutually

pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes, and our sacred Honor.” The signers recognized their interdependence and their dependence on God.

In today’s text from the Acts of the Apostles this Spirit-filled body of believers works on their DE-pendence on one another and on God. They voluntarily shared everything they had. No one forced them. Everyone had enough...there were no needy among them. They were in complete accord, one in heart and mind.

Verse 33 reveals the source of this amazing community's unity. The apostles are endowed with "great power," and the entire church receives "great grace" This "great grace", the Greek is mega charis, so changes human nature that the general statement made in verse 32 - "no one claimed that any of his possessions was his own" - is shown being put into active practice in verses 34 and 35. Lands and possessions are sold and proceeds from the sales are brought to the apostles for distribution. The text does not indicate that those with lands and goods sold all they had, impoverishing themselves for the sake of equality. Rather, the gift of great grace creates a caring community which naturally does all it can to provide for its poorer members. Grace enabled these early Christians to go beyond their independence and replace it with concern for the whole community as the highest priority.

The text continues by giving a couple of examples of sharing. Barnabas provides the good example of sharing. Barnabas, of his own will and volition, sold his field and gave the money

to the apostles for the benefit of the community. He shows his dependence on God and the church by giving all he had. We'll see this 'son of encouragement' again later in Acts as a companion of Paul.

Now we come to the story of Ananias and Sapphira. They provide us with the example of sharing badly. Let's see a show of hands. Who thinks God zapped them? I always thought so too, but if we look closely at the text we'll see there was nothing wrong with what they did. It was their land, and they didn't have to sell it at all. Or they could have sold it and kept part of the price, openly saying that they needed to keep part of it. The problem was that they were looking for the honor that came to Barnabas as a result of his gift and they came pretending that they had done the same thing.

Ananias and Sapphira blatantly thumbed their noses saying, "We're taking care of ourselves first and giving you the rest but you'll never know." They were effectively declaring their Independence from God. However, I do not believe that either Peter or God killed this couple. They were in the presence of the enormous power of the Holy Spirit, and when they lied in the presence of that power, it was just too much for them to bear. I think they were literally scared to death. Lying is a sin, no matter to whom you lie. It is as much a sin to lie to your husband or wife as it is to lie to the IRS or your pastor. But lying in the face of an enormous outpouring of the power of God can apparently be fatal.

The terminal sin of Annanias and Sapphira was not their failure to give, but their intention to deceive God and the church. They relied on their own wits and scheming rather than depending on God. It cost them their lives.

I do that too sometimes. I stare at my computer screen trying desperately to complete a sermon only to realize I've forgotten to pray about it. I'll stew and stew about a conversation or a contentious situation before finally laying it at the feet of Jesus. So, more and more I realize the folly of trying to do things on my own and I firmly declare my dependence on Jesus and His great grace.

Let us pray.

Call 2 Fall is a nationwide effort taking place today all around the country, where both churches and believers can gather in prayer for our country. The Call 2 Fall Declaration comes straight from 2 Chronicles 7:14.

Lectio Divina – lek-see-oh di-vee-na

1. Literally – Sacred or Divine Reading
2. Ancient Christian tradition of meditation and prayer.
3. Typically an hour long daily practice. Obviously not doing that now. Just 5 minutes...It will be hard tho coz normally we're bombarded by sound. We don't spend time in silence. 5 minutes will feel like an eternity. But bear with it...
4. Steps
 - a. Get comfortable. You may kneel if you wish and are able.
 - b. I'll read the text. Listen for a word or phrase that speaks to you.
 - c. Meditate on the text – Allow the work of the Holy Spirit to impart spiritual understanding of the sacred text.
 - d. I'll read the text again – Silently converse with God, remembering that a conversation requires listening as well as talking.
 - e. Lastly take a moment to lovingly focus on [God](#). Joyfully rest in God's presence.
 - f. After the service share your experience with at least one other person.

If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.