

FIRST AND CENTER

Pastor's Blog

February 8, 2018

Next week I have been invited to be part of a ceremony where Judge Alvin Thompson swears in new citizens of the United States. I've been asked to "say a few words" about what it means to be a citizen of this country.

And I am a bit torn about that these days.



It seems so incongruous that at the same time we have a President who is hostile, not only to so many native-born citizens, but doubly hostile to people who are immigrants or refugees, still so many people seek to come here and become legal citizens. There are days I, a native-born US citizen, want to run to Canada! How to reconcile?

I think the story of who we think we are and who many of us want to be in this country continues to be compelling to those who hope it might be true. I will never forget visiting Ellis Island and seeing this quote from an early 20th century Italian immigrant: "I came because I heard the streets were paved with gold. I got here to discover they were not paved with gold; many of them were not paved at all and we were expected to pave them!" In the age of TV and social media, I don't think even the most uneducated immigrant believes the streets are paved with gold, but the dream persists that this is a country where possibilities for life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness are endless. Possibility and hope are powerful motivations for those who struggle in oppression, in poverty, in fear or in persecution. And for millions of people over the past 300 years who have become citizens, that motivation **has** led to life, liberty and happiness.

I continue to dream of our country living up to the implied promise that this is a place where all people (not just men, or just white men, or just propertied white men, which is what the Declaration of Independence literally meant by this phrase) are treated as though we are created equal. We are a long way from that. I am excited to meet others who share this dream and now will be part of making it more of a reality every day as they work and study and teach and become part of institutions of all kinds, and as they vote. And for those who are still dreaming of the day they might stand before a judge and become citizens, please don't stop believing in the dream, and keep pushing us to be who we say we are.

~ Rev. Shelly Stackhouse,
Pastor