

“Out of Many One” - Rev. Dr. Adam Hange

*July 5, 2026 - Deuteronomy 26:5–9; "The New Colossus" (Emma Lazarus)*

How are we doing this morning, friends? How was your 4th of July?

Can I admit - this weekend was complicated... complicated feelings about our country... our role in the world...

This weekend, the calendar tells us to celebrate.

Fireworks. Flags. Two hundred and fifty years.

But I want to invite us into something different this morning.

Not a birthday party. More of a recommitment ceremony.

Because a birthday celebrates another year, but recommitment asks something more. It asks:

*Who did we promise to be? How far have we drifted from that promise? And how do we intend to honor it, from this day forward?*

It turns out Scripture knows exactly what to do with a moment like this one.

In Deuteronomy 26, Moses looks ahead to the day Israel will finally arrive. The wandering over. A land to call home. The first harvest coming in. The moment of maximum celebration ... their independence day, if you like.

And what does Moses command them to do at that moment?

Bring a basket of the firstfruits, set it down before God, and recite these words:

*"A wandering Aramean was my ancestor. He went down into Egypt and lived there as an alien, few in number... The Egyptians treated us harshly and afflicted us... and the Lord brought us out with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm... and brought us into this place."*

Notice what the liturgy is *not*. It is not "We built this." It is not "We earned this." It is not "This was always ours."

At the very height of arrival, at the peak of abundance, Israel is commanded ... not asked, *commanded* ... to remember its own displacement. To say out loud, every harvest, every year: *we were migrants. We were refugees. We were the strangers at someone else's border, and we survived because we were taken in.*

Why command it? Because memory decays into myth in a single generation. Because a settled people forgets, with astonishing speed, that it was ever an unsettled people.

And so the command echoes through the law: *You shall not wrong or oppress a resident alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt. You shall love the stranger as yourself.*

Even here, this land held older stories still ... the Kalapuya tell their own histories of displacement and sojourning and homemaking on this ground, older than every flag that has flown over it. The story of our species is a story of migration. All of us, if we go back far enough, are the children of wanderers.

Yesterday, at the Fourth of July parade, I carried our sign: "We Are Immigrants ... Somos Inmigrantes."

And as I passed, I heard one man sneer: "*Yeah ... but some of us are legal.*"

I know better than to argue with someone in the middle of a parade. But friends, that sentiment is out there. And I want to name it for what it is: historic amnesia.

It is precisely the forgetting Deuteronomy was written to prevent. The moment we say "some of us," we have already lost the thread of our own story. The creed insists otherwise: *all* of us were strangers. There is no "some of us" in a wandering people. The basket of firstfruits comes with the confession attached, or it doesn't come at all.

One of the stories we like to tell about ourselves stands in New York harbor: the tired, the poor, the huddled masses yearning to breathe free. A golden door.

For some of us ... or our parents, or our grandparents ... that door was real. That story was theirs...

But we must be honest: for others, the door has stayed shut. Or become a revolving door, welcoming some for a season, only to spit them out.

I think of Ghassan, our friend, a Palestinian refugee, still waiting, still seeking asylum in Canada.

I think of our Haitian neighbors in Springfield, Ohio ... not far from my hometown ... whose protected status was ended overnight. People who had lived there ten years or more, slandered from the highest office in the land, made into a punchline instead of being seen as people worthy of dignity.

I think about the Braceros, welcomed to work our fields while men were away fighting fascism abroad, then turned away when they wanted to put down roots for themselves and their families.

This past week, listening to the Supreme Court's ruling on birthright citizenship read aloud, I confess... I held my breathe. I was not certain how the court would rule.

Because the question of who counts, from birth, as one of us ... that is not abstract. That is a family down the street. Maybe someone in this room.

Benjamin Franklin, leaving the Constitutional Convention, was asked what kind of government they had made. He didn't say a strong one. He didn't say a lasting one. He said: "*A republic ... if you can keep it.*"

If. Not a promise. A charge.

Now ... hear something remarkable that happened this very weekend.

Yesterday, on our 250th Independence Day, the Bishop of Rome ... the first American pope, himself a descendant of immigrants ... chose to spend the day not at a celebration, but on the island of Lampedusa, where so many migrants first touch Europe after crossing the Mediterranean.

He laid flowers on the graves of those who never finished the crossing. He stood at the memorial they call the Door to Europe.

And from there, he wrote a letter home. To us. For our anniversary.

In it, Pope Leo commended what is best in our history ... a nation that in every generation has been shaped by those who arrived seeking freedom, opportunity, and a place to belong. He wrote that defending human life includes "welcoming, protecting and assisting immigrants," and that to receive them with compassion is not only an act of charity, but "a recognition of the dignity that belongs to every human person."

Do you hear it? The pope was reciting our creed back to us. *A wandering Aramean was my ancestor.*

Remember who you are. Remember who you promised to be.

So where does that leave us?

Not with an easy patriotism that waves the flag and looks away from what is hard to see. And not with a cynicism that has given up. It leaves us with something harder to hold than either: **courage and hope, held together.**

I've seen it. In Minneapolis, when word went out that neighbors were being taken to detention, the faith community didn't form a committee. They showed up ... different churches, different traditions, different politics ... because someone else's child was afraid, and that was reason enough.

And I'm proud to say we've seen that same spirit here in Hillsboro. Maybe you glimpsed it yesterday, at that same parade.

I want to say, that is not a footnote to the American story. That is the best of it.

*E pluribus unum*. Out of many, one. It's stamped on our coins ... but it is aspirational. Not an achievement; a task. As Dr. King said, a promissory note, still owed.

And - lest we misunderstand - "out of many, one" does not mean assimilation. It does not ask the stranger to disappear in order to belong. Not a melting pot, where every flavor dissolves ... a gumbo, a salsa, curry, a potluck table where nothing has to erase itself to be welcome.

Our diversity is our strength.

In a few minutes, we come to the Communion Table.

One loaf, many crumbs. One cup, poured out for all ... not for a favored few, not for the most deserving, not for citizens only. But for all.

Just as Love has no borders, God's welcome, has no exceptions.

So come to to this table carrying whatever you're carrying ... your grief over what our country has failed to be, your fear for a neighbor, your anger, your disappointment, your silence, and your held breath. Lay it down here.

And let this meal do what it has always done: form us, again, into a people of covenant promise ... a people who can still say, without shame and without amnesia:

*A wandering Aramean was my ancestor*. Out of many ... one.

May it be so. And may we be the ones who make it so.