

# We Need to Remember

May 28, 2023

**Memory can be a tricky thing.** There are some things, however, that we should never forget. One of these is the sacrifices that others have made in our behalf.

It was a spring morning in 1866, just after the Civil War that had devastated the South. A group of mothers and daughters in Columbus, Georgia did something quite extraordinary. **They marched down the streets of what was left of their town to a cemetery.** There they decorated the graves of Confederate soldiers, their husbands, sons, and fathers. But as they decorated those graves with flowers they noticed the many graves of Union soldiers, left unattended and unremembered. Their hearts broke as they thought of the mothers, wives and children of these soldiers. It was then they decided to decorate the graves of the Union soldiers as well. Unexpectedly, these women began to bury their hatred and a time of healing had begun.

**There are those who remember when Memorial Day was called Decoration Day.** Cemeteries were filled with people kneeling to plant a flower or place a garland or unfurl a flag or to say a prayer. Some still do. But most people can no longer be bothered. It would take time away from the lake, the backyard, or the ball park.

At many National Cemeteries across the country it has become necessary to advertise for volunteers to place flags on the graves of veterans as the number of veteran volunteers has decreased.

**However, many of those who volunteer have no idea why they are there.** At the National Cemetery in Long Island, one of the nation's largest a 13-year-old boy, was asked if he understood why he was there placing flags on the graves. He quickly replied, "To get service hours."

**Memorial Day is one of our major holidays,** marked with a 3 day weekend because now days it marks the beginning of summer. It has shifted away from its original meaning, remembering those that died in service of their country during a war. But we need to remember. We need to remember the debt we owe to others.

**We need to remember those who died that we may live in freedom.**

You and I do not have what we have today by our own efforts alone. There is no greater myth than that of the self-made man or woman. We owe an enormous debt from the moment we come into this world. Some of that debt is owed to men and women who shed their blood on battle fields. They gave their lives because they truly believed that freedom is worth dying for.

**To honor their sacrifice is not to glorify war.** War is the ultimate violation against God. Still, we live in a cruel world where tyrants would impose their will on others. It would be nice if we lived in a world where people always played by the rules, where no one coveted his neighbor's property, **where never again would we have to depend upon military might to enforce justice.** But such a world does not exist.

**When the Civil War flared up,** a young Texan enlisted and marched off to fight with his friends. "We won't be gone long," he claimed, "cause we can lick them Yankees with broom sticks." Four years later when the fighting was finally over, the young man came home, a beaten man. **One of his neighbors asked, "What happened?"** I thought you were gonna beat them Yankees with broom sticks." "We could have," replied the young man, "Except we couldn't get 'em to fight with

broomsticks."

It would be nice if we could totally eliminate our defense establishment with the knowledge that no nation would ever commit aggression against its neighbor again. But that's not the way the world is.

**Winston Churchill used to tell a parable about a zoo in which all the animals decided to disarm.** They arranged 'peace talks' to work out the details. The rhinoceros asked for a strict ban against the use of teeth in war. The deer and porcupine agreed, but the lion and tiger defended teeth as being honorable weapons. The bear, however wanted both teeth and horns to be banned, but suggested that all animals be allowed to give each other a good hug when they quarreled. This only served to offend all the other animals, and so they never could agree.

**That's the kind of world we live in.** And thus, through the centuries young men, and young women, have been sacrificed in the cause of one noble ideal after another. **We honor the memory today of those who have given their lives believing that they were making the world safer, freer and more humane.**

**We need to remember those who died living out their faith.**

There are others who have given their lives for us who never wore uniforms or carried guns.

Revelation 7:14 says this, ***"These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."*** These are people who have given their lives in the service of Jesus and the Kingdom of God. There have been an untold number of such sacrifices through the ages.

**While today we remember those who have died in battle we also need** to remember committed followers of Jesus who have been martyred in service to the kingdom of God. They died in battle as well, the battle between light and darkness, good and evil. Christian persecution and martyrdom still goes on today.

- Every month 322 Christians are killed for their faith.
- Christians in more than 60 countries face persecution from their governments or neighbors because of their faith.
- Roughly 1,093,000 Christians were martyred, worldwide, between 2000 and 2010.

On the evening before Easter Comfort Jessy and her family sat in the courtyard of their home in Nigeria spending time friends, About midnight Boko Haram militants came and burned the church next door, which her father pastored. The soldiers began pounding on the gate in front of their home. Comfort's mother quickly took her husband into the house to hide him. Several militants searched the house and dragged her mother into the courtyard, striking her their guns and taunting her about her faith. They said, "You Christians say God has a son! Call on that son! Today is your last day."

One of the men gave a shout from inside the house, they had found Comfort's father. They dragged him out and commanded him to renounce Christ. He remained silent. The militants shot her father four times and burned the house before leaving.

The stories are plentiful of faithful Christians who have and continue to make the ultimate sacrifice for the Kingdom of God. They gave their all, and we should not forget them.

**We remember Christ who died that we may live forever.**

Pastor J. Wilbur Chapman used to tell a story of a soldier who was mortally wounded. His buddy Jim

stayed by him through to the very end. "Jim, I'm going to die," Charlie whispered to his friend. Knowing Jim had no family of his own, Charlie added, "But I want you to go back to my mother and take my place there." "But Charlie, your mother doesn't know me," Jim reminded his dying friend, "and she would not allow me to come into her home and live as a son." "I will write her a letter and you will take it to her," Charlie explained.

The letter told the mother of her son's situation, of his wounds, and of his suffering, and how Jim had stuck by him day and night through it all. The letter closed like this, "Mother, receive Jim for my sake."

**Jim carefully tucked the letter away in his uniform coat.** After the close of the war he went to Charlie's hometown and sought out the mother's home. He knocked at the door and stood waiting, ragged and worn from the ravages of war, a very unsightly character.

**As the lady opened the door,** she looked at him and thought he was just another soldier turned beggar. But Jim handed her the letter through the half-opened door. She read it, recognizing her son's handwriting. **When she read the last line, "Mother, receive Jim for my sake,"** the expression on her face changed, tears of deep emotion welled up inside, and she opened the door wide, threw her arms around the soldier in a warm, loving embrace, receiving Jim "for Charlie's sake."

According to scripture, that sort of acceptance is the story of the cross. God accepts us as beloved children for Christ's sake. We may not understand how this happens. But we look at the cross and we see there an open door and a welcoming, loving embrace.

**And so we remember.** We remember those who died that we may live in freedom. We remember those who died living out their faith. We remember Christ who died that we may live forever. This is the ultimate meaning of Memorial Day. May we take this time to remember.

Amen