

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven:

a time to be born and a time to die,

a time to plant and a time to uproot,

a time to kill and a time to heal,

a time to tear down and a time to build,

a time to weep and a time to laugh,

a time to mourn and a time to dance,

a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them,

a time to embrace and a time to refrain,

a time to search and a time to give up,

a time to keep and a time to throw away,

a time to tear and a time to mend,

a time to be silent and a time to speak,

a time to love and a time to hate,

a time for war and a time for peace.

Many individuals and wars will be remembered this week, but this morning I would like to take a look at the Civil War; because it is in the Civil War where Memorial Day has its roots. It was John A. Logan, a former Federal general, who called for the first formal day of remembrance on May 30, 1868. School children were asked to spread flower pedals upon the graves of the war dead. Since that time the day has been changed to the last Monday in May and the concept has been expanded to include a remembrance of America's war dead sustained in all her conflicts. Did anyone know this? I didn't! I want to suggest to you two reasons why Christians should celebrate Memorial Day.

First, Memorial Day should be a time to reflect. We should reflect upon the extremely high cost of war and the fact that our freedom is costly. If Lew Wallace, who fought on the Shiloh battlefield, had been killed, then we would never have known of the great American literary work Ben Hur. If Ulysses. S. Grant had been killed at Shiloh we would have lost the 18th president of the United States. If Francis A. Shoup had been killed while leading his Confederate Battalions we would have lost a university president. Did anyone know this? I didn't know!

But these were men who survived to live out their potential and life's dreams. What of those who did not make it through? Just think about all those who lost their lives in war, and how many potential doctors, authors, college presidents, political leaders, clergymen, and inventors who had their careers cut short during the horrible two days of Shiloh alone. Just think about how many Christians and possible Christians lost their lives in defense of our current freedoms? Now multiply that by all of the battles and all of the wars in America's history and we begin to realize just how staggering the toll: All in all over 1 million deaths. Its right we gather this morning to remember; less we forget that war robs us of the real flowers of our nation.

We remember today not only those who have been killed in battle, but also those who have been touched by the rippling effect of war. A pebble tossed into a pond creates a ripple which grows, ever widening, until those ripples touch the outer banks. War is like that, example; John Thompson of New York City, born to James and Ellen Thompson in the year 1844. There was a certain gentleness, about the country at that time. Still, life was hard.

At age 15 John's father died and he was forced to quit school and go to work to support his widowed mother and his younger sister, Elizabeth. At a salary of \$4 a week, he became an apprentice bricklayer. Then came the war, and nothing would ever be the same again. On August 25, 1861, at the age of 19, John enlisted in the 51st New York regiment. Through mid-September 1862, Private Thompson continued to support his mother by sending home most of his meager army pay.

On September 17, 1862, as his regiment was attempting to cross Burnside Bridge during the Battle of Antietam, a sharpshooter's bullet found its mark, and young Thompson, in many ways just beginning his life, fell dead, but the tragedy did not end there. Records indicate that his mother, stunned and sickened by her son's death, became gravely ill and never completely recovered. From the autumn of 1862 to the autumn of 1863, her health declined steadily until finally on November 21, 1863, she died, leaving her daughter Elizabeth, age 8, an orphan of the state. Today records indicate that Private Thompson is buried in the National Cemetery at Antietam.

His great sacrifice is easy for all to recognize, but we cannot forget the rippling effect of his death and how his loss affected the lives of others. His mother and his sister were also the victims of war, though history has long since lost track of their resting places.

What does this have to do we us here at Landrum United Methodist Church, today? This church, I'm sure has had many individuals, some members some not, but they all had one thing in common. They loved the Lord God with all their heart. They loved this church, God's church, and all it stood for. You could probably name many of them who did so much for this community through this church, but what about those who never had that chance? What about those who died before they had an opportunity?

What about those who were injured as a result of personal wars? Those who were ignored, abandoned, or just plain run off through the years? How many of those lost their Christian lives because of what was said and/or never said? How many have been killed off in the name of Christianity? How many lives have been destroyed by harsh words, inconsiderate acts, or maybe through arrogance?

There is a time for everything, and I think the time is now; a time for healing, a time for building and/or rebuilding. Now is the time for us to remember those who were lost as a result of our self-serving selfish attitudes. Now is the time to seek out and gather, to gather in those who are sick and suffering. Now is the time to seek the lost and it begins with us today, it begins with me, it begins with you.

We gather this day not only to remember but also to commit and/or recommit. If we walk away this morning, and let tomorrow's holiday pass us by with no stronger resolve than to just bring an end to wars around the world, then we have celebrated Memorial Day in vain, and created just another day to go to the lake and/or to get some shopping done. There needs to be a commitment or recommitment to not only end wars around this world, but to also end the wars here within our own lives. The wars we have with each other, wars of jealousy, pettiness, envy, and so on.

Were all of these deaths necessary? However, war alone can hardly be the answer to the world's situation, and, in the end, it might well be our undoing. General Douglas McArthur stood on the deck of the battleship USS Missouri in Tokyo Bay in 1945 to receive the formal surrender of the

Japanese Government. At that time he made a very astute observation. He said and I quote: *“The problem is basically theological in nature. It must be of the Spirit if we are to save the flesh.”* Those words came not from a preacher but instead from a professional soldier.

Just outside the city of Atlanta, Georgia, there is a monument called Stone Mountain. It took two generations to create this enormous carving on the side of a mountain that depicts three heroes of the Confederacy: Robert E. Lee, Stonewall Jackson, and Jefferson Davis. Although it is a fascinating memorial, the logistics that were required in creating such a work of art is mind boggling, but the message is somewhat disturbing and often missed. See, all three men are clothed in battle uniforms and sitting atop white horses. The message this monument sends to all who view it is clear, war is glorious. Despite any positive personal qualities these men may have exhibited in their own lives, I would suggest to you that in this chiseled artwork we have missed the true message of war. We should not and cannot be deceived today as we move toward this Memorial Day. As we participate in all its celebrations and perhaps some will take time to visit memorials around this nation. It would be easy for us miss the message of war.

It is only as we read the letters and diaries of those who fought that we can grasp that message. Listen to these soldiers speak:

During the Civil War:

“Oh, how I long to be home with you and I would forfeit all that I have in this world if I could be let loose from this,” wrote a Louisiana soldier to his wife.

A Union physician stated: “How I long for this war to be over so that I may go quietly back to my profession of curing and not killing people.”

Another Federal soldier wrote at the battle's conclusion: “You have no conception of the amount of suffering here. It is a horrible sight.”

The same sentiments could be written today of people right here living in the shadow of this cross. People living here in Landrum, Spartanburg, Tryon, and Columbus who could write these same words; “Oh, how I long to be home with you,” or “How I long for our fighting to be over,” or “You have no conception of the amount of suffering here.” The same words written so long ago fit people today right here who are suffering; suffering from battle fatigue and yes even injuries; injuries from personal battles we have with each other.

So we gather this day, both to remember and to recommit. We remember those who made the ultimate sacrifice for this nation. Some were instilled with a sense of patriotism and duty. Others may not have had such

high ideals. They were in faraway places; they were somewhere they did not wish to be, fighting a war that they did not completely understand.

We must also remember those who made the ultimate sacrifices here at Landrum United Methodist. Remember those who put aside their own personal wants, desires, jealousies, pettiness, and envy just to help others. Remember those who died as a result of these wars here within these walls.

At this point, it makes no difference whether we can remember what we did or didn't do, said or didn't say. Those whom this day honors, they all paid the supreme price. In death they are all equal. In death, they are all dignified. It is now remaining to us, the living, to move forward to not only remember what the pillars of the church did, but to recommit our own lives to God that their deaths may not have been in vain. Now you have no reason to say "I Didn't Know."