

McCabe United Methodist Church
Asking The Right Questions (part 7): *Why Is Remembering Important?*
Joshua 4:1-9 : May 25 & 26, 2013
Pastor Rick Fossum

Memorial Day or *Decoration Day* is on Monday. In 1971, President Richard Nixon and Congress made *Memorial Day* an official federal holiday always to be observed on the last Monday of May.

Memorial Day was first unofficially proclaimed on May 5, 1868 by General John Logan, the national commander of the Grand Army of the Republic. It was unofficially observed twenty-five days later on May 30, 1868, when flowers were placed on the graves of both Union and Confederate soldiers at Arlington National Cemetery. For General Logan, *Memorial Day* was not about continuing the north - south division, but about reconciliation. It was about honoring all soldiers, north and south, who gave their all.

In 1915, Moina Michael wrote a poem called *In Flanders Fields*. The poem goes like this:

*We cherish too, the Poppy red
That grows on fields where valor led,
It seems to signal to the skies
That blood of heroes never dies.*

It was Ms. Michael who came up with the idea of wearing *red poppies* on *Memorial Day* to honor those who died during the Civil War. She was the first to wear one. She sold poppies to her family, friends and co-workers and gave the money to needy servicemen and women.

Memorial Day has evolved to include a time of remembering not only our soldiers, but also family and friends who have died. In a few minutes, we will remember and honor the family and friends of McCabe UMC who died within the past year.

Sadly, the importance of *Memorial Day* has diminished over the years. Far too many Americans have forgotten the meaning and traditions of *Memorial Day*. At some cemeteries, the graves of veterans are neglected and ignored.

I don't use the word *ought* very often, but on *Memorial Day* every American *ought to* pause and take time to remember and honor those who made the sacrifices to help make America what she is today . . . free and strong, with liberty and justice for

all.

Because of their sacrifices, have many freedoms. Because of them, we have the freedom to worship as we please. Because of them, we have the freedom to speak our minds and write editorials and travel as we please. Because of them, we have the freedom to join a political party or not. Because of them, we have the freedom to own guns, have access to a better education, receive health care and other freedoms.

I don't know who wrote this, but it was written by someone who understands our country and the word sacrifice. Listen to these words:

A mother asked President Obama: **“Why did my son have to die in Afghanistan?”**

Another mother asked President George W. Bush: **“Why did my son have to die in Iraq?”**

Another mother asked President George H. W. Bush: **“Why did my son have to die in Saudi Arabia?”**

Another mother asked President Johnson: **“Why did my son have to die in Vietnam?”**

Another mother asked President Truman: **“Why did my son have to die in Korea?”**

Another mother asked President Roosevelt: **“Why did my son have to die on Iwo Jima?”**

Another mother asked President Wilson: **“Why did my son have to die on a battlefield in France?”**

Another mother asked President Lincoln: **“Why did my son have to die at Gettysburg?”**

And still another mother asked President Washington: **“Why did my son have to die on a frozen field near Valley Forge?”**

Then, long, long ago, a mother asked: **“Gracious God, why did my Son have to die on a cross outside of Jerusalem?”**

The answer is always the same: **“So that others may live.”**

This is why we need a *Memorial Day*. If we don't remember, it won't take many future generations before we forget.

In our passage from Joshua, God uses the word *memorial* to give instructions to Joshua. God tells Joshua to choose one man from each of the twelve tribes of Israel. Each man was to take one stone and together build a memorial to the people of Israel that will last forever.

Of course, that memorial is long gone. We don't know where it was built or what it looked like, but we do know it was God's way of telling future Hebrew generations to always remember the sacrifices of others who went before them.

Today, we remember and honor family and friends who died this past year as well as the soldiers and sailors who sacrificed their lives.

For example, Major Sullivan Ballou was from Rhode Island. He fought in the Civil War. On the eve of the first *Battle of Bull Run*, he wrote a letter to his wife. The letter is dated July 14, 1861 or the early part of the war. Listen to these heart-breaking words from a husband to his wife:

*July 14, 1861
Camp Clark, Washington DC*

Dear Sarah:

The indications are very strong that we shall move in a few days - perhaps tomorrow. And lest I should not be able to write you again I feel impelled to write a few lines that may fall under your eye when I am no more.

I have no misgivings about, or lack of confidence in the cause in which I am engaged, and my courage does not halt or falter. I know how American Civilization now leans upon the triumph of the government and how great a debt we owe to those who went before us through the blood and suffering of the Revolution. And I am willing - perfectly willing - to lay down all my joys in this life, to help maintain this government, and to pay that debt.

Sarah, my love for you is deathless, it seems to bind me with mighty cables that nothing but omnipotence can break; and yet my love of Country comes over me like a strong wind and bears me irresistibly with all those chains to the battlefield.

The memory of all the blissful moments I have enjoyed with you come crowding over me, and I feel most deeply grateful to God and you, that I have enjoyed them for so long. And how hard it is for me to give them up and burn to ashes the hopes and future years, when, God willing, we might still have lived and loved together, and see our boys grown up to honorable manhood around us.

If I do not return, my dear Sarah, never forget how much I loved you, nor that when my last breath escapes me on the battle field, it will whisper your name.

Forgive my many faults, and the many pains I have caused you. How thoughtless, how foolish I have sometimes been! But, O Sarah, if the dead can come back to this earth

and flit unseen around those they love, I shall always be with you, in the brightest day and in the darkest night... always, always. And when the soft breeze fans your cheek, it shall be my breath, or the cool air your throbbing temple, it shall be my spirit passing by.

Sarah do not mourn me dead; think I am gone and wait for me, for we shall meet again.

Sullivan

Major Ballou was killed one week later at the first *Battle of Bull Run*, July 21, 1861. His letter to Sarah was never mailed. The letter was found in his personal belongings when Governor William Sprague of Rhode Island went to Virginia, where the battle of Bull Run was fought, to recover the remains of Rhode Island soldiers who died in that battle including the remains of Major Ballou.

To Major Ballou and to all the men and women who sacrificed so much for our country free, we say thank you. To all soldiers and sailors, past and present, who served our country, we say thank you.

We owe them a debt . . . a debt of gratitude. When we visit a cemetery this weekend and see the rows and rows of white crosses, please say a little prayer. Underneath each cross you see, lies the body of a veteran. Underneath each cross you see, lies the body of a soldier, with his or her own unique story. Underneath each cross you see, lies the body of a person who fought for a cause greater than themselves.

It was President Abraham Lincoln in his *Gettysburg Address* who said, **“The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but the world can never forget what they did here.”**

And so on this *Memorial Day*, we remember and honor all those who have gone before us. Those we know and those we don't. We remember, with gratitude, their service to God and to the USA.