

"TODAY, LET'S REMEMBER..."  
John 15.12-17

Today, let's remember and honor our soldiers and their families.

We hear, but unless we're really part of the family,  
or have experienced war;  
we vaguely understand the enormous price that a family pays  
when the work of a husband or wife, mommy or daddy,  
brother or sister, employee or employer,  
when their work becomes war.

Today, let's remember to honor God.  
We thank God for our country, for one another,  
and for Jesus; who loves us, who died for us, who made us friends,  
and who gives us our mission and marching orders.

"Today let's remember one of those orders, the order to "love one another."  
John 15.12, *"My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you."*

We are ordered or commanded *"to love."*  
Why commanded? I'm so glad you asked.  
You may not be glad about the answer.

We're commanded to love because we need help to love.  
It isn't natural for us to love as God loves.

We can only love the way God loves if we accept Jesus  
and remain in God's love,  
remain intimately at home, remain intimately at home in God's love.

One of the ways we can express our love to others is by forgiveness.  
Forgiveness is an expression of divine love.  
It is a decision made in the best interest of another.  
It isn't that gushy, heart pounding, palms sweating,  
knee knocking kind of love.  
It is an act of one's will.

Actually when we think about it, it is not only in the best interest  
of the "forgivee," but forgiveness frees the forgiver as well.

It helps the wronged person become better not grow bitter.

God put us in this world to produce good fruit; fruit that doesn't spoil,  
fruit that will last, and fruit that will taste better not bitter.  
There is nothing more wasted or worthless than bitter fruit, is there?  
So today, let's remember that without forgiveness, we can't produce good fruit.

Here is a wonderful story of some women who produced good fruit.  
On May 5<sup>th</sup>, in 1868, General John Logan,  
representing an organization of Union Veterans from the Civil War,  
ordered that the graves of fallen soldiers be decorated with flowers.

He said, "We should guard their graves with sacred vigilance...  
Let pleasant paths invite the coming and going of reverent visitors and fond mourners.  
Let no neglect, no ravages of time, testify to the present."

Actually, the practice of decorating the graves  
had begun a couple of years earlier.

According to the internet one of the first documented sites  
to hold a commemoration for fallen soldiers was Columbus, Mississippi.

On April 25, in 1866, after the battle of Shiloh  
the wives and mothers, sisters and daughters  
decorated the graves of their Confederate fathers and sons, husbands and brothers.

Then these women did a very incredible thing;  
they decorated the graves of the Union soldiers.

They honored the men who were responsible  
for the deaths of their fathers and sons, husbands and brothers.

What an amazing act of forgiveness,  
to love and forgive others the way Jesus has loved and forgiven us.

So, today let's remember the first words of Jesus on the cross.  
He prayed, "Father, forgive them, they know not what they do."

And let's remember he taught us to pray about forgiveness,  
"forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespasses against us."

Remember, when you and I pray that prayer,  
we're not simply performing a religious duty  
but actually engaged in conversation with Almighty God,  
seeking forgiveness from God and offering forgiveness

So today, let's remember we need to forgive others.

Forgiveness is a good way to love,  
a great way to love but Jesus tells us there is a better way.

Verse 13 (MSG), "This is the very best way to love. Put your life on the line for your friends. ",  
(in the NIV) "Greater love has no one than this; that he lay down his life for his friends."

And today let's remember, JESUS Did just that, and others have as well.

Much of what we hear and see in the news  
is discouraging, depressing, and demoralizing.  
But every once and awhile, even in the midst of all of that,  
We'll hear a story that can encourage us, inspire us, and give us a new hope.

The story of Private First Class Ross McGinnis, even though tragic, is such a story. On December 4<sup>th</sup>, 2006 McGinnis, who was stationed in Iraq, was the machine gunner riding with four buddies on patrol in a Humvee. An insurgent tossed a grenade into the vehicle.

McGinnis yelled "Grenade" which allowed his buddies to get ready for the blast. Then instead of bailing out, he fell back on the grenade, thus taking most of the blast. Three of his buddies were wounded but eventually all of them returned to duty.

McGinnis received a Congressional medal of honor for laying down his life for his friends.

Ernie Hyde, a veteran of WWII and a member here at First UMC, When you see your friends give their lives for cause and for country it's hard to talk about.

Another soldier, a Marine, sacrificed his life for Brennan Manning.

This Marine had tried over and over to nag and drag Manning into the Kingdom of God.

They were sitting on a log chatting one night and a grenade landed between them.

As the Marine fell forward, he looked at Manning, smiled, winked and waved, and landed on the grenade.

Two questions kept haunting Manning. As he talked with the Marine's father he wailed something like, "I don't know why he did that? I don't know if he loved me?"

And the Father screamed back, "Love you? Man, he died for you!" Manning didn't get it, did he? I think most of us have a hard time really getting it. We have a hard time really believing and trusting that Jesus loves us.

We read it, we hear it, we speak it but I'm not sure we really believe or think that we can trust that he loves us.

Paul gives us a clue as to why we don't get it, Romans 5.6-8 (MSG), *"Christ arrives right on time to make this happen. He didn't and doesn't wait for us to get ready. He presented himself for this sacrificial death when we far too weak and rebellious to do anything to get ourselves ready..."*

We're just not ready even if we want to be ready. But you know what, Jesus comes to us anyway.

Jesus comes to us just the way we are,  
 sits beside us, and says to you and I,  
 I know all about you, I know what you think,  
 what you've said, and what you've done.  
 I know what hurts you and what makes you happy.

That is what a close friend does-Right  
 You know what?

Jesus even calls us friends, verses 14-16,  
*"You are my friends when you do the things I command you.  
 I'm no longer calling you servants  
 because servants don't understand what their master is thinking and planning.*

*No, I've named you friends because  
 I've let you in on everything I've heard from the Father."  
 You did not choose me. I have chosen you..."*

In the ancient times to be a friend of the King  
 was to be chosen to be part of a communion,  
 part of a select group who had access to the king.  
 They knew the king and they knew and shared what was going on.

So again today, remember that Jesus comes to you,  
 sits with you, and says to you  
 I love you despite your most shameful sins,  
 I love you in your most horrible of horrors,  
 I love you in your deepest, darkest disgrace,  
 I love you despite your feeble faith, your lack of love,  
 the poverty of your spirit, and your constant toying with temptation.

Just trust me when I say I love you just as you are,

So today, most of all, let's remember it is the King of Kings,  
 the Lord of Lords, the Great I AM, the Creator of the Universe,  
 our All in All that comes to us as a friend and makes us a friend.

The reality of that certainly continues to contain a mystery.

Let me take one more shot to illustrate that with a Max Lacado story.  
 The night before the D-Day invasion General Dwight D. Eisenhower  
 spent some time with the men of the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne.

He walked from soldier to soldier and offered words of encouragement.

The next day after he watched the C-47's disappear into darkness,  
 He sunk his hands deep in his pockets  
 and walked back to his quarters with eyes full of tears.

There he took out paper and pen,  
and wrote a note, that in case the Allies were defeated,  
the note would be delivered to the President of the United States.

The note included these words, "Should our efforts have failed  
the troops, the Air, the Navy, did all that bravery and devotion could do.  
If any blame or fault attaches itself to this attempt, it is mine alone."

You know most of us are willing to take credit for the good we do.  
Some of us are even willing to take the rap for the bad we do.  
A few of us might accept some responsibility for the mistakes of others.  
But fewer still are willing to shoulder the blame  
for the mistakes of others not yet made.

Isn't it amazing.  
Eisenhower, the general, was willing to take the potential responsibility  
for the failure of his troops and he became a hero.  
Jesus did take the responsibility for our moral failure, our sins,  
and became our Savior.

Paul tells us something about this mystery, Romans 5.7-8?  
*We can understand someone dying for a person worth dying for,  
and we can understand how someone good and noble could inspire us to self-sacrifice.  
But God put his love on the line for us by offering his Son in sacrificial death  
while we were of no use to him what so ever.*" (while we were yet sinners)

As Lacado points out,  
Jesus was the general who died in a place of a private,  
The king who sacrificed for his subjects,  
The master who served his servants.

Jesus didn't just assume the blame, he seized the sin.

Jesus didn't carry a rifle or sword in his hands,  
nor did his finger ever push a button to send a missile or blow up a bomb.

But his hands held nails, nails for our sins  
and his body bore the bullets, the blades,  
and the blasts of our brokenness, our hatred and hostility, and our rebellion.

Jesus didn't wear medals on his chest, he wore stripes on his back  
Jesus didn't wear a helmet on his head, he wore a crown of thorns.  
And his head held that crown of thorns,  
because his heart held his father's love,  
his father's love for you and I.

So today, let's not only remember our soldiers, their sacrifice, and their families  
But let us remember our savior, his sacrifice, and his friendship. Amen

