



WESTMINSTER
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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Heroes
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Romans 5:6-11
2 Samuel 23:13-17

The story in our Old Testament Lesson is about David, holed up in a cave near his hometown of Bethlehem. David is fighting the Philistines who occupy Bethlehem.

He remembers the well by the gate in Bethlehem, the well from which he drank as a boy after playing games all day; the well from which he was refreshed after a long night of watching his sheep.

He begins to think out loud, how wonderful it would be to have a drink of that water: “Oh, that someone would give me water to drink from that well.”

It was all he said, but it was enough. He did not even notice when, in the stillness of the night, three of his most valued soldiers slipped out from the cave.

They gathered their weapons and they were gone: On their way through enemy lines, sneaking past the Philistine sentries, on their way to the well at the gate in Bethlehem.

David had said he would love to have some water from that well, and whatever their beloved king wanted, they would get it for him.

When they returned with the water, it had to be a moment of great emotion for David, for he instantly realized that their gift, at risk of their lives, was a gift worthy only of God, not for a mere human like himself.

He says, “Far be it from me, O Lord, that I should do this. Shall I drink the blood of these men who went at the risk of their lives?”

Because of what he saw as their heroic acts, he pours the water on the ground as an offering to God.

On this Memorial Day, we have to, in the context of this Old Testament story, think about our heroes: Where do we find them?

Our first thoughts might pull up that picture of this church’s founding pastor, Dr. John Galbreath as a chaplain on Iwo Jimo, or pictures of D-Day; Pork Chop Hill in Korea or the Tet offensive in Viet Nam, Iraq and Afghanistan, all those wars and all those soldiers who died.

Some of you have places in your heart for a special someone who died in the line of duty.

Alden Solovy, in his poem “Remember My Heart,” writes on their behalf:

*When you see a flower bloom
Between the cracks in stone,
Remember me.
Remember my heart and my hands.
The hands of sons and daughters,
Of dreamers and doers,
Soldiers by necessity,
Civilians targeted for terror,
Old hands, young hands, children’s hands,
Hands that yearned for life.
When you see a flower bloom
Between the cracks in stone...
Remember what cannot be stolen,*

*Our love, our hope,
Our history, our home...
When you see a flower bloom
Between the cracks in stone,
Remember me.
Remember that beauty survives,
That our love is strong,
That our sacrifices are holy,
That our cause is just,
That our people will endure...
May the Holy One
Shelter your heart in the wings of comfort
And bring peace, at last,
Peace at last.*

The Prince of Peace himself said it, ‘to lay down one’s life for another is the greatest sacrifice of love.’

Those we remember as heroes are different in so many ways, but heroes have two things in common: compassion and courage.

Sounds a lot like Jesus, doesn’t it? His heart was also filled with compassion and courage, which enabled him to be brave in the face of great danger.

Jesus did not deserve to die, either. He had done nothing wrong. To the contrary, he had done a lot of things right.

He spent his life, especially his public ministry, trying to protect the most vulnerable around him from those who exploited them and made their lives difficult.

He exposed the hypocrisy of selfish and corrupt leaders, spoke truth to power and challenged all leaders, religious

and secular, to use their influence to make life better for everyone, not just a chosen few.

When necessary, he didn't mince words and he was certainly not timid. He called the Pharisees a brood of vipers and overturned the tables of the money changers when he entered the temple during Passover.

His pursuit of justice and peace brought him everything but peace. In the end, it cost him his life.

Listen again to Paul's words: *For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person; though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.*

The way Paul puts it, someone might be willing to give up his or her life for a noble cause, but to die on behalf of an evil person...inconceivable.

But here it is, the gospel of Jesus Christ dying on behalf of sinners, and it was such a sacrifice, that here we are still talking about it; but why did Jesus do it?

Why didn't he leave Jerusalem that fateful week when he realized his life was in danger? Why didn't he run into the night when the soldiers came for him in the Garden of Gethsemane?

Paul answers that question, saying, "God demonstrates his love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

Jesus died in order to save the very people who were crucifying him. God gave his only son to die, not because God didn't love him, but because God loved us so much.

The greatest sacrifice: an innocent man died to save the whole world, friend and foe alike.

Which brings us back to this weekend in which we remember the heroic dimension of so many people; people like Kendrick Castillo, the young high school senior who died protecting others in the school shooting in Denver or Riley Howell, who gave his life disarming the shooter at the University of North Carolina, Charlotte.

Wouldn't you say they had hearts filled with compassion and courage, to be brave in the face of great danger?

But where are the heroes who stand tall to stop the source of violence so that our children don't have to be martyrs?

I think of those who are willing to speak up for those who have no voice, the poor, the children, those who are vulnerable and have so little when so many have more than enough.

Emily Sargent wrote: *Courage is quietness, Not martial music made; Born of facing up to life, Even when afraid.*

In other words, heroes don't always make the headlines, get interviewed on TV, or have streets named after them.

Anyone in that cave with David could have gone out that night. Everyone had the opportunity to find a way past the enemy lines to get water for the King, but only three did.

You may be standing on Holy Ground in the presence of unknown, unseen heroes, and you don't even know it.

You may be standing by a hero in the checkout line at the grocery store, working two, three jobs to put food on the table; you may be standing by a hero in the elevator at the hospital, someone giving hope and comfort to a grieving family.

A hero may be sitting next to you in the classroom, or in the cubicle down the hall, or in the car next to you stopped at the red light.

These people are never in the news, but these are the people who keep the commitment of godliness and bring the water of refreshing life.

There they are, unknown, unnamed, heroes...

Resisting the promiscuous climate of the day, standing courageously against the tempting lifestyles around us, trying to do the right thing.

Maybe you don't remember Chris Parker or Stephen Jones. Both were homeless: Parker was panhandling outside the Manchester Arena in England a few years ago when a bomb exploded, and Jones had found a place to sleep nearby.

The force of the blast knocked Chris Parker to the floor and woke Stephen Jones. Rather than running for safety, they went to the aid of victims

Mr. Parker told about comforting a girl who had been seriously injured, wrapping her in a T-shirt, and cradling a dying woman in his arms.

Mr. Jones says he did what he could to help those children who had been hurt.

“Just because I am homeless doesn’t mean I haven’t got a heart, or I’m not human still,” he told *ITV News*. “I’d like to think someone would come and help me if I needed the help,” he said.

Jones said he did what anyone else would have done.

You would like to think so, wouldn’t you?

Mariah Carey, several years ago, had a hit song, with the one-word title, “Heroes.” She wrote the song:

*Lord knows
Dreams are hard to follow
But don’t let anyone
Tear them away.*

*There will be tomorrow
In time
You’ll find the way.*

*And then a hero comes along
With the strength to carry on
And you cast your fears aside
And you know you can survive.*

*So when you feel like hope is gone
Look inside you and be strong
And you’ll finally see the truth
That a hero lies in you.*

On this Memorial Day Sunday as you remember heroes past and present, think about where our heroes are, and consider the hero inside of you.

When compassion and courage combine, they are powerful. Compassion without courage can be intimidated and silenced. Courage without compassion can be self-absorbed and violent.

Together, however, they turn people from all walks of life into heroes.

The people of Jesus Christ have a chance to witness to the heroic dimension of life, because we know where the water of life is...we know who needs it...let us be willing to get up and go get it, to sacrifice as the sacrifice has been made for us.

TO GOD BE THE GLORY.



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