

Remembering the Future

Mount Zion Church

Memorial Day 2014

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more.² And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them as their God; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; ⁴he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away."⁵ And the one who was seated on the throne said, "See, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true."⁶ Then he said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life.⁷ Those who conquer will inherit these things, and I will be their God and they will be my children. (Rev. 21: 1-7)

Saturday Morning I took my motorcycle out for a ride. I rode through the scenic and ever changing Kansas wheat fields. I rode past fields where corn plants were just starting to push through the ground. I rode past streams that were running and farm ponds that were nearly dry. I rode through the dramatic Flint Hills and into many less exciting places because after all I was riding in Kansas! It's not all unbelievable, it's not all inspiring but it is all ours and I love it and I am glad to live in this incredible place! I took the motorcycle ride to celebrate the symbolic first weekend of summer! The motorcycle, the wind, the smells, the sights served as a reminder that soon the warm summer sun would be warming my arms and face tanning them and then burning them as I ride. The motorcycle ride was a reminder that some would say I am crazy for riding at all!

I wore my helmet as I rode. I always do! I am crazy...not stupid! The helmet gave me a sense of safety and security as I leaned into the gentle turns of the roads of

Butler and Cowley counties. I felt that same sense of safety and security as I gathered with our church family Sunday for worship! We gathered to reflect on the reality of the Holy Trinity. I tried to explain the Trinity to the children of our congregation with chocolate bars. Again some would say I am crazy. The kids however seemed to enjoy the chocolate...crazy not stupid!

Today, as I woke to come to this place I wanted to ride the bike. Threats of thunderstorms caused me to pause and think for awhile. I have ridden in rain and lightening before but never intentionally and never to make a preaching point. I took one more look at the weather forecast as I headed out the door and once again put myself in the crazy but not stupid category, got in my car and enjoyed the air conditioning and dry climate of the drive to this wonderful place. I want to thank you all for inviting me. It is a privilege to be here and share some Memorial Day thoughts with you! The first thought I want to share is that I am here because I can be here!

You may think I am headed for another crazy not stupid line, however on this point I stand firm. I am here because I can be here! You are here because you can be here! For that we should all give thanks! Sometimes we do not realize the privilege of simplicity we enjoy in this country. We take for granted that we can go where we want to go, say what we want to say, and react to others openly and without fear! Truly, we hold these truths to be self evident! As we come together for a service of remembrance today we should remember that we are here because we can be...because others have paid the price for our privilege...because God has endowed us with certain inalienable rights. As I entered this place and prepared for these remarks, I entered mindful that I am here today because I can be...because I live in the land of the free and the home of the brave!

The second thought I want to share with you this morning is that while we gather today to remember our past those whom we honor today served our country because they remembered our future! The One Million, Two Hundred thousand brave men and women who have lost their lives fighting to defend our nation, our liberties, our freedoms in the more than a dozen wars and conflicts we have

engaged in since our nation's founding did not stand for their proud past. They stood, they bled, they died remembering the promise of a future they believed in!

Those who sacrificed their lives in the Revolutionary war not only remembered "No Taxation without representation," but they remembered sons and daughters who would live a life free from tyranny, free from oppression. They struggled to survive not because of the homes and farms they already had but because of the possibilities their children might have. They remembered their future.

When Captain James Lawrence said "Don't give up the ship" as he was carried mortally wounded from the deck of his ship in the war of 1812 he was not thinking of the ship he was serving on, he was thinking of the ship of our country's future! He was thinking of the days when his children would find joy in playing at the lakeshore on a warm summer day! He was imagining the time when his grandchildren would run free through the wooded areas around the Great Lakes where he was fighting! He and all the patriots who fought with him were not engaged in the present. They were remembering the future!

In the Mexican War our "Manifest Destiny" was not to dominate other peoples and cultures. It was to spread the ideas of liberty and justice for all to the entire continent. Our nation's culture must own the casualties of our zeal for freedom and we must recognize that some were wronged in our quest for our national ideals. Those who were wronged then still suffer those wrongs today and the brave men and women who fought and died for the inalienable rights guaranteed to all people by a creator who sees all people as equal will not be fully justified until all people in this nation are not only seen as equal but treated as equal. Those who fought in this conflict did not intend a future of persecution for any group or groups of people. They remembered a future where this nation stands for all.

The Civil War, the war responsible for nearly half of all the casualties of war in our nation's history cannot be romanticized even today. Brother fought against brother and we all bled blue and grey! For the nearly half million who died there was a sense of passion and purpose in their conflict. There were real differences that caused a tear in our national fabric. Those whom we remember today from

that conflict did not fight for two separate nations. They did not fight for a return to past lifestyles and a pretending that the war never happened. Both sides fought to remember a future where their ideals could be sewn together into a cloth of hope. They remembered a future where their sons and daughters could enjoy economic and personal freedom to live a life honoring their culture and traditions.

Today we gather in the fullest expression of those dreams. Today, this holiday, this Memorial Day is born not out of conflict with a foreign invader but out of the differences we find in our neighbors. Today we decorate the graves of those who remembered the future differently from one another and who were willing to offer the last full measure of their devotion to that future. Decoration Day was started in 1868 to remember not just the victors, but all who were willing to stand for the truths they believed self-evident. It is the difference in these truths that becomes the thread which sewed our nation together. The remnant of that cloth has clothed us in hope now for 149 years! It's colors of blue and grey and the red of blood serve to remind us of the future for which so many died.

World War One was the "War to End all Wars." Today many of our young men and women who died in Flanders Fields still rest there! They were called away from home and family and as they left they did not seek to return to things exactly as they left them. They sought to return to a nation that was now part of a world made safer by their actions. They did not remember a past filled with fields plowed by horses and cleared by manual labor. They remembered a future filled with the promise of prosperity and peace. They remembered this future for themselves and for their posterity.

World War Two was fought "Over There!" The sentiment of our nation for a long time was to let the battle stay "Over There" We did not want to get involved. We did not want to fight someone else's fight. There are many conspiracy theories about how we came to be involved in this war but it was obvious to many that we could not escape it. Those whose lives we honor today did not fight to protect a status quo. They fought because of the targeted extermination of nearly 12 million people for their beliefs and religion. They fought because of words Martin

Luther King would echo decades later. "The threat to justice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere!" Those who fought remembered a future where justice could prevail not only for us but for all people. They fought for a world where the promise of justice anywhere is the hope for justice everywhere!

Korea, Viet Nam, Desert Storm, Iraqi Freedom, the war in Afghanistan, all these conflicts. Each of them comes with a heavy price. Today we gather to honor the price some paid for the freedoms we claim. Certainly we remember Tyler Juden today. We salute his courage and commitment to the promise of freedom. I am quite certain that as he gave the last full measure of devotion to the love of his country he did not give that measure to the past. As Sergeant Juden served I know he served the future, a future he remembered with a sense of hope and optimism.

As I come to this place today I have in my mind a picture. Somewhere deep in the vaults of the Butler County news is a photo taken in 1951. It is a picture of George, Raymond, Wilson, James, Jack, Bill, and Roy. Jack is my father. The others are his brothers. All of them served in World War Two. All of them returned. The picture celebrates the remarkable fact that they all returned. They all realized that many did not. My dad once told me that standing just to the side of the 7 was my grandfather, himself a veteran of the Spanish American War. My Grandfather was born in 1864, the year the Civil War ended. Impossible as it seems, I am only two generations removed from that war and from the first celebration of the holiday we celebrate today!

As I come to this place today, I come not to remember the past with you but to invite you to remember the future with them...with each of those who sacrificed so that we might have a future. I invite you to commit yourselves not only to their memories but to their cause. Today at 3 PM I invite you to pause for a moment and silently celebrate their lives but at 3:01 I invite you to remember the future they believed in so completely that they were willing to offer their last full measure of devotion to it!

We may not all be called to go to far away places to suffer and die in strange lands, but we are all called to defend the freedoms and liberties for which our

nation stands and for which our flag flies! Today I invite you to remember the words written that formed this great nation! We hold these truths to be self evident...that all people are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable right, the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness! These words are not part of our past. They are the foundation of our future. They are the future the men we honor today remember! They are the future we must remember as well.

Later today I will gather with my family. We will eat, we will laugh, we will enjoy. As we gather I will remember . I will remember the scenic Kansas countryside that I rode through. I will remember the deep affection for the place we all live. I will remember the great passion I have for our nation. I will remember that I came to this place this morning because I could. I came...we all came because of the future these men and women helped create for us, a future filled with promise and with peace. Let us honor them together as we work for that same future.

I saw a new heaven and a new earth. The old heaven and the old earth had passed away. There was no more death, no more tears, no more mourning for the loss of loved ones who gave their lives for our future. God Himself wiped away every tear in that future. All who came into that future were given water to drink, the water of life, a living water not to quench the thirst but to satisfy the very soul. In that new heaven and earth there is a future where all are treated fairly and all have more than enough. This is the future the men and women we honor this morning remembered. This is the future they invite us to remember as well. Let us honor them today by remembering this future and by working together to make this future a reality. For those who have gone before...we will never forget! For those who are yet to come...we remember your future! But in this moment may God join us in our remembering and with all of our shortcomings and faults may we continue to pray...God Bless America!