

Sermon 052817 Memorial Day
Scripture Mark 3: 20-30
Sermon Title The American Spirit

A friend of mine from high school, Dennis Delehanty, has been doing a retirement project. He is digitally cataloging letters written between his parents during WWII. His mother wrote from New Haven, CT to his dad every day he was serving in the US Army, which involved 830 letters in all. His dad was an officer serving in North Africa, Sicily, and Italy.

His dad's letters were somewhat breezy 'don't worry about me' letters with no real details as they were subject to censorship. His mother's letters were far more detailed and heartfelt.

One particularly poignant letter said that she was confused one morning when she turned on the radio. She heard prayer after prayer after prayer during a time usually reserved for the news. Then she learned why all the prayers. The date was June 6, 1944, what we now call D Day, the invasion of Normandy.

I hope everyone here knows this history, but in case someone doesn't, let me thumb nail it for you. If you ask someone like me what the most important event in world history was, I'd say Jesus Christ. But if you ask the biggest thing that ever happened in world history, the answer is World War II. In fact, nothing comes close.

It was a war that consumed the whole world. Our country fought it on two fronts, the Atlantic and the Pacific. When D Day happened, the outcome of the war was very much in doubt.

Normandy is a coastal region in northwest France. France was occupied by our enemy at the time, Germany. The invasion of Normandy was the largest amphibious invasion in world history, and the most complex. The magnitude of it is mind boggling even today. The invasion was led by the Americans, and they had the most difficult and dangerous part, landing at beaches called Omaha and Utah. The best depiction of the invasion in cinematic history is the beginning of the great film, *Saving Private Ryan*.

That fateful day was the day that Dennis' mom woke up to all the prayers on the radio. Prayer is always a good idea and none more so than that day.

Mrs. Delehanty's subsequent letters were no less poignant. It took time for the people back home to realize that the invasion was successful. They knew that the Allies had gotten a foothold but they didn't know if they would keep it. Also, when the magnitude of the casualty lists hit, it was hard for them to imagine that it was actually successful.

I try to imagine the uncertainty and worry that engulfed her and the entire nation in that time. When they say that war is hell, it is not just for those in combat.

Dennis' dad was not in the invasion of Normandy, but he was in the amphibious landing at Anzio Beach, Italy. That invasion was also successful. But months after it took place, he wrote that he felt like a 'sitting duck' while on that beach.

Just to complete the little history lesson, for anyone who doesn't know it, largely thanks to American involvement in the war, the allies won and the world was saved from tyranny. Both Dennis' parents survived the ordeal and went on to build a great life and raise three fine boys to successful adulthood. No doubt there are many here who have family stories about WWII that are equally poignant.

I, by the way, have not visited Normandy or the American Cemetery there. But I have seen pictures of the ocean of American graves there. I have been to the American Cemetery in Italy which is associated with the Anzio invasion with its sea of American graves. It is such a profound experience to stand on American soil in a foreign land contemplating the sacrifices that our fellow Americans have made in foreign wars.

The question begs asking, 'Was it worth it?' Was all the bloodshed and death and sacrifice worth it. A pacifist would say

absolutely not. I would say, yes, it was worth it. I may have a different answer if I had a loved one buried over there, but I do believe that the sacrifices were worth it.

Why? America is an ideal. Our country is still relatively young and still an experiment. We were founded on ideals. We are ruled not by kings but by citizens. We live by laws and no one is above the law, no one. We have a system of government that has checks and balances that prevents any one branch from ruling arbitrarily. We have our Bill of Rights. The Bill of Rights is at work this morning, here where we have freedom to worship as we please.

We have an inexhaustible source of strength. That source of strength is our story, our history, who we are, how we got to be where we are, and all we have been through, what we have achieved.

I am not looking through rose tinted spectacles here. Sometimes we look at our country and see nothing but a big buzzing mess. Some might say that is the case today. We seem a country divided. There is great uncertainty about where we are headed as a country. But, I suggest that we look back to June 6, 1944 to see the level of uncertainty that they lived with. Or look at the uncertainty in the country on July 1, 1863, the first day of the Battle of Gettysburg, the largest battle in the American Civil War.

This Memorial Day weekend, when we remember the American War dead, and we ask the was it worth it question, I ask each and every one of us to make it worth it. Let us resolve to be good Americans, to obey the laws, to vote, to attend the parades, to volunteer in the community, and to be good neighbors. Let us listen to each other, respect other opinions from our own, find areas where we can agree, and try to move forward together. It will only be not worth the sacrifices of our fore bearers if we let them down by not loving our country and acting accordingly.

I know this is Memorial Day when we honor our war dead, and Veterans Day is months away. But we cannot honor our war dead without honoring those who survived, our veterans, particularly our combat veterans. They are the fortunate ones, but many live with wounds that last a lifetime. We also honor those who serve, protect and defend here at home. They are the grease that keeps this crazy American machine running.

And one last thing... God Bless America. AMEN