

Trinity Sunday – Memorial Day Weekend – 5/27/2018

Sermon Outline – “There is Freedom Here”

- Sermon length last time – not to worry! – Donna has an air horn in her purse that she plans to sound after 15 minutes
- On this Trinity Sunday, the Sunday following Pentecost, I will not be tackling the challenging topic of explaining the theology of the Trinity – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – three-in-one – beyond the three-leaf clover analogy in the children’s sermon, the featured scripture passages and the hymns selected
- I’ve been reading, in sermon preparation references, that Trinity Sunday is often a Sunday on which pastors tend to plan for a vacation absence, because the notion of providing a concise explanation of the Trinity is such a daunting challenge; pastors often pass along the challenge to a seminarian, guest minister, or some other poor soul to face that challenge (wait a second – that would be me!)
- Sooooo, I’m not taking the bait, but I’m focusing instead on the happy fact that this year Trinity Sunday falls on Memorial Day weekend, a weekend, and a Monday national holiday, on which we pause to remember, and give thanks, to those who have made, in many cases, the ultimate sacrifice of their lives in defense of our country’s freedom and way of life, preserving that freedom in the many struggles that the United States has faced over its history
- For the choir’s anthem this morning we heard the simple, yet beautiful work entitled “Blades of Grass and Pure White Stones”, which takes us to the vivid visual scene of an expansive military cemetery with its rows upon rows of white grave stones of fallen heroes
- This beautiful vocal piece is taken from a larger musical entitled “There is Freedom Here” by Claire Cloninger and Russell Mauldin. Beyond the solemn tone of “Blades of Grass and Pure White Stones”, most of the other choral pieces in this musical are certainly of the rousing, patriotic, red-white-and-blue genre, but they emphasize our heritage as a “nation under God”, in gratitude for the privilege of being able to freely practice our Christian faith (or other faiths). But, in the process, this musical also reminds us that America’s greatness is so strongly dependent on God’s grace and care

- This brings to mind the words of one of our scripture passages this morning, Psalm 29. "Ascribe to the Lord .... ascribe to the Lord the glory of his name"; "Bow down to the Lord in holy splendor"; "The voice of the Lord is powerful, the voice of the Lord is full of majesty"; "May the Lord give strength to his people, may the Lord bless his people with peace"
- Thoughts from other vocal pieces in the "There is Freedom Here" musical:
  - "Let Us Pray" – a most appropriate way in which to honor the lives that have been given, the blood that has been shed, is to continually, day by day, pray as a nation, under God, giving thanks for God's care and protection in the past, and also praying to discern as best as we can God's will for how to proceed in facing the challenges and struggles that we are facing currently, and those in the future; do we collectively reach the same discernments, the same insights, the same direction? – no, certainly not – but the need for prayer is always there, centering our minds on God, calming our raw emotions, reflecting quietly on our concerns
  - "There is Freedom Here" – remembering that the legacy of freedom we enjoy stems from the visions, the dreams, the sacrifices of all those who have come to this land, all with their own unique dreams of freedom and visions for a new life, in all the many ways that they arrived (those who can trace their lineage to arrival on the Mayflower or other of the early colonial vessels that reached our shores; those whose distant ancestors crossed the land bridge between Asia and North America; those whose families arrived in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century in steerage class, arriving from Europe at Ellis Island or on the west coast from Asia; those whose ancestors arrived in this country in the belly of a slave ship from Africa; those who have come from nations around the world on work or student visas; those who made their way to this country escaping conflict and chaos in their homelands, whether from Southeast Asia, or Cold War Eastern Europe, or Latin America, or elsewhere); and appreciating that a crucial freedom that we have, as a result of those sacrifices, is our freedom to worship God, and practice our Christian faith in the fashion we do
  - "O God Our Banner" – God has abundantly shed his grace on this land, such that America has stood as a beacon of freedom and liberty to the world ("American exceptionalism" – not breast beating), and as Christians we need to continually hold up God as our banner, our faithful standard, as we move toward the future

- "I Pledge Allegiance to the Lamb" – as Americans we have and often express an allegiance to our flag and our country, certainly, but as Christians we hold an even higher trust, a higher loyalty, to God ("In God We Trust") and to his son and our savior, Jesus Christ
- Let's return to the words of today's anthem, "Blades of Grass and Pure White Stones"; as we ponder that green expanse and the white grave stones, keeping in mind the diversity of those who have made the sacrifice; highlighting now a few examples of the range of heroes buried under the "pure white stones", at Arlington National Cemetery and other national cemeteries:
  - Audie Murphy – US Army, WWII, North Africa, Italy, France – native of Texas -- too short to join the Marines or to be a paratrooper, enlisted in the infantry – as a young boy, helped his mother raise 10 siblings – most decorated infantryman of the war – received a hero's welcome – among the most visited white grave stones at Arlington National Cemetery-- James Cagney persuaded him to pursue an acting career, eventually made 40 films
  - Louis Cukela – Marines, WWI – native of what is now Croatia – emigrated to US, served in Army until honorably discharged in 1916 – with WWI raging, he enlisted again in the Marines, received Medal of Honor twice, once from the Army, once from the Navy, for his actions during battle in France
  - Michael Novosel – served in US military during three wars – WWII (Army Air Corps – flew B29 bomber), Korea (Air Force Reserve), Vietnam (Army) – gave up the rank of lieutenant colonel in the Air Force Reserve at age 41, while working as a commercial airline pilot, to become an Army CWO and fly medical evacuation helicopters in Vietnam; received Medal of Honor for a medical evacuation under fire (speaking of different discernments, consider the plight of Vietnam veterans in particular)
  - Daniel "Chappie" James – Air Force -- also served during WWII, Korea & Vietnam – native of Florida -- attended Tuskegee Institute and became one of the WWII Tuskegee Airmen – instructed African American pilots during WWII and also served as a B25 pilot, flew combat missions during Korea and Vietnam – in 1975, became the first African American to achieve the rank of four-star general
  - John Raymond Rice – Army, WWII & Korea, where he died in battle in 1950 – native of Nebraska – awarded for valor and bravery in Korea –

was denied burial in the local cemetery in Sioux City, Iowa because he was an American Indian, a Sioux – President Truman intervened and ordered that he be buried at Arlington National Cemetery

- (note on change to anthem lyrics – “boys” to “those” – reflecting contribution of women and current roles in the military) Ollie Josephine Bennett – WWI, Army – one of first five women to serve as doctors in US Army Medical Corps – designed her own uniform, since none was available – instructed 300 nurses and enlisted men in the proper application of anesthesia
- Desmond Thomas Doss – WWII, Army, Pacific theater – Medal of Honor recipient – upbringing in Virginia in Seventh Day Adventist church meant he felt forbidden from “bearing arms” – however, refused religious exemption and joined the Army in a medical detachment – detested the phrase “conscientious objector”, preferring instead “conscientious cooperater” – saw combat on Leyte, Guam, Okinawa -- refused to seek cover on Okinawa and remained in the fire-swept area with the many stricken, carrying them 1 by 1 to the edge of the escarpment and there lowering them on a rope-supported litter down the face of a cliff to friendly hands
- There are many, many personal stories to share, but I’m sure that air horn warning is going to sound at any moment!
- Engage in prayer every day, but especially on this Memorial Day weekend, honoring the memory of those who have served our country, many having given their lives in service, but also in our prayers seeking God’s guidance for the future of our country as we struggle with all the challenges we face as a nation. Amen!!!!