

“No Greater Love than This”

Date: November 9, 2014

Place: Lakewood UMC

Texts: John 10:11-18; John 15:9-17

Occasion: Veterans Day

Themes: Sacrifice; Sacrificial Love

Today we honor our men and women in uniform who have served our country in the military. Tuesday is Veterans Day. We salute those who *have* served and those who are currently serving. We pray for those who return wounded, either in body or in spirit. We remember those who gave *all* in the service to their country.

There is something heroic and noble in being willing to die, so that someone else might live. Jesus said, “No greater love has any man than this - than a man lay down his life for his friends.”

Our military has learned and taught that lesson well. The Church, which is supposed to carry this message, is perhaps a little slower to demonstrate it.

Sacrifice, *self-less* sacrifice, this is what Jesus taught. The world **admires** this kind of self-less, sacrificing love. We don’t see it in action often enough. But it is that kind of love that will win the world to Jesus Christ.

President John F. Kennedy, in the early 1960’s, challenged and inspired a nation when he said, “Ask not what your country can do for you. Rather, ask what you can do for your country.” JFK inspired millions of people by asking them to give back to their country, instead of holding out their hands for freebies.

In Romans chapter 12, verse one, Paul writes: “Present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.” What the apostle is saying is simply this – God is

less interested in animal sacrifices on the altar, a lot more interested in the sacrifice of a person's heart and will. In other words, it's not enough simply to go through the motions of religion.

What is being asked of us, as Christian, is that we give our whole lives to God. We give our life to God when we surrender our hearts to Jesus. We ask Jesus to make His home inside us.

The proof that the King is in residence in our hearts is by loving our neighbor as we ourselves would like to be treated. This is our living sacrifice, which is holy and acceptable to God: that we should love one another.

Instead, too often we hold back, believing someone else will do it for us. The story is told about a king, who invited his subjects to the palace for a celebration. Each subject was to bring a gift, a bottle of his finest wine.

Now, it so happened, that one subject, wishing to save his finest wine thought no one would notice if he substituted water in his bottle. When all the people had gathered, the king told them to pour their wine into a huge wine barrel, in the courtyard.

After this had been done, the king invited everyone to have a drink. To the startled king came the realization that each and every one of his subjects had brought water!

Are you bringing your finest wine to the King? Does God get the best of your time? Is there time in your day for prayer, Bible reading, and worship? Or do you bring merely water? Does God get the first check that you write at the beginning of the month? Or do you bring water to the king? Does God get the best of your talents? Too often God gets what is left over, whether it be our time, talent or treasure.

You see, sacrificial living is not merely laying down one's life on the battle-field. For the Christian it means *living* sacrificially, to honor the King. The paradox of the Christian faith is that living for self is really death, while dying to self is truly life.

Christ laid down his life for his friends, for you and for me. And we are called to be like Jesus, by living sacrificially. No greater love than this, than a person lay down his or her life, day by day.

There is a beautiful love story, supposedly true, from the time of Oliver Cromwell in England. A young soldier had been tried in Military Court and was sentenced to death. He was to be shot at the ringing of the curfew bell.

However, his fiancée climbed up into the bell tower several hours before curfew, and tied herself to the bell's huge clapper. At curfew time only muted sounds came from the bell tower. No curfew had rung, and no shots were fired.

Cromwell demanded to know why the bell was not ringing. His soldiers went to investigate and found the young woman, cut and bleeding from being knocked back and forth against the great bell.

They brought her down, so the story goes, and Cromwell was so impressed with her willingness to suffer in this way on behalf of someone she loved, that he dismissed the soldier saying, "Curfew shall not ring tonight."

Jesus said, "No greater love than this." Sacrifice. Putting one's own needs behind the love that one has for another.

How many of you have seen the famous picture known as "The Praying Hands?" Do you know the story behind it? From childhood, Albrecht Durer wanted to paint. Finally, he left home to study with a

great artist. While away he met a friend who shared this same dream, and the two became roommates.

Both being poor, they found it difficult to make a living and study at the same time. Albrecht's friend offered to work, while Albrecht studied. The plan was, when his paintings began to sell the friend would have his chance to study.

After much persuasion, Albrecht agreed. He worked faithfully while his friend toiled long hours to make a living. The day came when Albrecht finally sold a wood carving.

His friend went back to his paints, only to discover that the hard work had stiffened and twisted his fingers, and he could no longer paint with any skill. It was a tragedy. He had worked so hard to help his friend, and now he could not pursue his own dream.

When Albrecht learned what had happened to his friend, he was filled with deep sorrow. One day, returning home unexpectedly, he heard the voice of his friend, and saw the gnarled, toiled hands, folded in prayer in front of him.

He thought, "I can show the world my appreciation by painting his hands as I see them now, folded in prayer." It was this thought which inspired Albrecht, when he realized he could never give back to his friend the skill which had left his hands. Albrecht Durer's gratitude is captured in the now, world-famous painting.

No greater love than this - than one would sacrifice his career so that his friend may succeed. That's not how Jesus said it. But which is easier to do, to die or to live sacrificially?

This weekend we honor our veterans, who have made great sacrifices. In today's world, threatened by terrorists, and with on-

going wars, we are grateful to those who are willing to fight, and die if necessary, for the sake of freedom and democracy.

But I want to close my sermon by telling one more story that says, "*Patriotism is not enough.*" Edith Cavell was a British nurse, killed by the Germans during World War I. She had been captured and just before the bandage was placed over her eyes for the firing squad, she said, "I am glad to die for my country...."

"But I realize that patriotism is not enough." And then she gave a clear and definite testimony to her personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and the assurance of salvation. She died under the firing squad in 1915.

Do you understand what she was saying? It is good and right that we should honor our military heroes today and Tuesday. But as Christians, we must also realize that patriotism is not enough. We owe a much deeper gratitude to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus is the Good Shepherd who gave his life for the flock he loves so well. Jesus died so that we might live. He took the penalty that we deserve, so that we might go free. He gave his life. And not greater love has any man than he lay down his life for his friends.

And this is just what God did for us. This Veterans Day, let us give thanks for the men and women who sacrifice so much for their country. But let us also remember the price God paid for our salvation. And in gratitude, let us love one another as he loved us.