

“Send Me, Please!”

Salado UMC—Preaching Text: Isaiah 6:1-8

Trinity Sunday/2nd after Pentecost: 30 May 2021

+++++

“It is hard enough to remember my opinions, without also remembering my reasons for them!”

—Friedrich Nietzsche (1844 - 1900).

+++++

Memorial Day and Labor Day are bookend holidays. In the United States, they mark summers beginning and ending. Families celebrate these three-day weekends in traditional ways. Observed on the last Monday in May, Memorial Day remembers U.S. soldiers who lost their lives serving their country. First begun as Decoration Day in 1868, this holiday honored Civil War dead. Since then, it came to be a day for Americans to call to mind all U. S. soldiers, killed or missing in action, in all wars.

Memorial Day is not a church holiday—we remember the Saints on a day the church calls “All Saints Day.” Yet, Memorial Day is the way our nation remembers those who, as Lincoln said, “gave the last full measure of devotion.” Other countries also have their equivalents of Memorial Day. It is too bad that humans have days like this, but war seems to be inevitable. Remembering our war dead celebrates the gift of life soldiers have given for the ideals we lift up and commemorate.

Frederick Moore Vinson once said: “Wars are not acts of God. They are caused by man, by man-made institutions, by the way in which man has organized his society. What man has made, man can change” [from a Speech at Arlington National Cemetery (Memorial Day, 1945) by Frederick Moore Vinson (1890-1953)].

Over the years, there have occurred acts of war against our nation. Like most wars, many victims of terrorist acts were innocent—wrong place, wrong time. Perhaps, this is an irreconcilable thing about war—the wrong people are often the ones we call on to give their lives. For this reason, the church has categorically opposed war. From the time of St. Augustine on, there have been valiant theological attempts to justify war, for example, in the “Just War

Theory.” Generally, the balance of the church tradition has opposed war in all its guises. The church opposes society’s violence in our habitual acts of worship/prayer.

In the book of Acts, there is one example, from many, of how the submissive church fought and won against vast odds against the political powers of the day.

About that time King Herod laid violent hands upon some who belonged to the church.

[2] He had James, the brother of John, killed with the sword. [3] After he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. (This was during the festival of Unleavened Bread.) [4] When he had seized him, he put him in prison and handed him over to four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending to bring him out to the people after the Passover. [5] While Peter was kept in prison, the church prayed fervently to God for him (Acts 12:1-5).

Too often prayer and worship look hopelessly naive and ineffective. Yet, the church has stuck to its metaphorical guns. It has declared that prayers are far more effective than taking up arms. Non-violent resistance to governmental and political violence have been the traditional hallmarks of the Christian faith. This Memorial Day is a good day to remember this. For all the wars fought and all the wars won and lost, we can say for certain—there will come more wars to follow. Maybe Jesus knew something we tend to forget when he said, “But I say to you, do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also . . .” (Matthew 5:39).

Let me give you a personal example of how the church’s thinking goes on this power of prayer and worship, if you will forgive my impertinence. As a human being, I know how to deal with my enemies. People have trained me. I understand. We live in a world where old ways of thinking—“an eye for an eye”—is well established. We hear this thinking everywhere. Thus, when an enemy does me wrong, for example by spreading untruths or by ascribing to me nefarious motives, then I do know how to respond. But I tell you, when someone forgives me when I am clearly in the wrong, I’m not sure what to do with that. Perhaps, you too are like me. You might rather people to treat you poorly because then you can employ your defenses. These acts of forgiveness symbolizing God’s grace leave us exposed. We do not know how to respond.

Jesus' church for centuries practices the power of prayer and worship. These peaceful strategies empower Christians to forgive their enemies.

Our New Testament writers had a contemporary named Epictetus. Originally a Roman slave, he gained his freedom, became a philosopher, won patronage from the emperor Domitian, who banished him from Rome to Asia Minor. Epictetus wrote the *Enchiridion*, a classic of the Stoic philosophy, which was one of early Christianity's most attractive competitors. The book was a manual of instruction for officers in the Roman army. Yet, its focus was not on the tactics of warfare. Instead, it spelled out the attitude or the philosophy of life that soldiers should have. It told them how to act according to natural law and maintain control of their own lives. In a sense this is what our Bible is: a manual about how Christians should live when they reside in a battle zone (C. Freeman Sleeper, *The Victorious Christ: A Study of the Book of Revelation*, Westminster/John Knox Press, 1996, p. 54). When one is at war with the meanings of the culture in which one finds oneself in, then we must prepare for battle. But the battle is not violent. It is rather a spiritual battle—already won for us on the cross by the God we worship.

On this Memorial Day weekend, as we gather with family and friends to observe the freedom that others have won for us, may we also remember that God too calls us into a similar battle as well. It is a battle that puts our highest ideals and beliefs on the line, as we attempt to live out lives that reflect the gospel of Jesus Christ. One way to do this is to remember the awesome power of our God. Isaiah put it like this:

[6:1] In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple. [2] Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. [3] And one called to another and said:

**“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts;
the whole earth is full of his glory.”**

[4] The pivots on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke. [5] And I said: “Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips,

and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!”

[6] Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. [7] The seraph touched my mouth with it and said: “Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out.” [8] Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” And I said, “Here am I; send me!” (Isaiah 6:1-8).

All this text does is remind us that we worship a God who calls us. This God is grander and bigger and more awesome than any narrow or parochial problem we will ever meet. This, my friends, is worth remembering on any Memorial Day!

David Mosser, UMC, Salado, Texas 76571