

“Fearless Christians” Proverbs 31: 10-31, Psalm 100

What causes people to be remembered on Memorial Day? Clearly it is not that we only remember those who were as good as Jesus. Our goal as Christians perhaps should be to be more like Jesus but few if any of us would think that was even achievable in any lifetime except by one person and that is Jesus alone. What we remember are people of kindness and love and all the other qualities recommended in life by Jesus and his early disciples as fruits of the Spirit. That presents a memory or a picture of those of the ones whom God puts in our path for us to love. This Book of Proverbs scriptural portrait of a virtuous woman was used just weeks ago for the funeral scripture of a fine first lady recently departed. Barbara Bush, who was one of those people had both savory and sweet side and had wonderfully creative sense of humor and a good soul. In her time she had bipartisan support. Solomon the writer of the Proverbs who describes the virtuous women could not have done a better job because he was God inspired. This King of Israel was a man of great personal wealth and prestige but only because of his God given wisdom. When God asked him what gift he would choose if God would give it, he did not choose power or wealth. He chose wisdom and God being pleased with that choice, God added the others to the wisdom he gave Solomon. Therefore, Solomon was remembered by most as occupying a golden age in Israel's history. The prophet Amos was the exception. He thought Solomon's taxes had a negative influence on the poor, widows, orphans and others in distress but that is for another sermon.

In this passage, Solomon's virtuous woman and her service are worth a fortune in rare gems. Her children rise up to call her blessed and they remember that she was a good mother. She, like the woman thousands of years ago, loved, nurtured and taught her children well. It is true that good mothers and fathers in turn came from homes where there was at least someone who also brought them up well. The theme continues to grandchildren and great grandchildren and great, great grandchildren and beyond. Some things do not disappear with death. Our love and respect,

our memories and the effects of good people God prosper and are a model for us. Death may separate us from them for a time but not forever. Memories of good people last as long as our memory does. No one can throw a reunion or a party like God, the creator of this beautiful world, can. In my mind we will see all our departed loved ones again in a great reunion party. It will be like waking up from surgery but without the pain.

Tom Bulanda, was a male counterpart and a man of many virtues. Tom was a fearless Christian. As a young man he volunteered to go to Viet Nam and fight for his country. In later days he was not afraid to express his opinions in sermons. He used his life to create a sermon of a kind Christian gentleman. Most of the time, I shared his opinions. It might have been all the time but agreeing is not always our best quality as we all look for truth. Tom was a good friend and a formidable Marine and not only a hero in war but an everyday hero in this congregation. Who will ever forget Tom? I am sure we won't!

Tom was uniquely good person. Through the eyes of faith, there are many good people in this world and even among those who sit here and we are all good when we are focused on God and even perfect when our thoughts are transformed by God. We may need to come back next week for another prayer of confession, but while we are here, we are good people forgiven and prayerful and deep in our memories of ones who taught us how we ought to love our God.

On this Memorial Day I was going to ask Tom to share with us memories of his departed comrades in arms in Viet Nam, but alas they will have to be my own memories. I lost two good friends in Viet Nam.

A good friend of mine Tony Prizgintas was a 2nd Lt. of Company "A" of the 5th Marines died in Viet Nam on December 30, 1968 from fragmentation wounds. He was deployed on November 1, 1968 and turned 23 just ten days after landing in Quang Nam Province. Tony is frozen in my memory as a fellow light weight wrestler on my High

School team and I am thankful for his friendship and think about him every Memorial Day. Tony was an immigrant to this country having fled Soviet occupied Lithuania sneaking with his parents and siblings over the German border, It made he and his family appreciate America all the more. He was willingly, like Jesus to give up his life for what he loved. The same was true of a college friend who one day in a lunch line at the college cafeteria ran into a Marine recruiter who gave us all a test to see if we were officer material. Dale Charles Allen, was older than most of us because he had served in Kennedy's Peace Corps out of high school. Dale was engaged to a woman named Charlene or "Charlie" as she was known. Dale was my floor and dorm leader. Let me say, he was very tolerant and helpful especially when it came to forgiving college pranks. He went to Quantico to Platoon officer training and then to Viet Nam in the summer of 1967. Dale in his first action trying to take hill 689 from the North Vietnamese near Khe Sanh was shot in the head and killed. I went to his funeral and burial in Deshler, Ohio in September of 1967. I could hardly stand to be there, thinking of all the life he would miss in life and how much Charlie would miss him. There she was, crying uncontrollably. Today I thank Tony and Dale and Tom, my father and all those vets who have passed away for their service and courage. All those who showed up, bled and died are worthy of profound thanks and pleasant memories and continued love and respect. The Psalmist says we approach God with thankfulness in worship. God's mercy endures to all generations and our thankful memory serves them well who have been a part of our lives and have now departed. It is one thing we can still continue to do for them keep our memories.

This is Memorial Day weekend. Memorial Day started right after the Civil War when women decorated the graves of soldiers who had died in the service. It started in Hollywood Cemetery in Richmond, Virginia. It spread as Decoration Day to all veteran retirees who have died who were once in the service. In the past weeks veteran's organizations replace the flags which grace all veteran's graves. Now we remember all our loved ones military or not. For the Air Force the adjutant teams at Wright -Pat usually do the funerals for their active men and women killed in the line

of duty. Veteran retirees are usually done by veteran's organizations. When neither could do it As an Airforce Auxiliary Chaplain, I was asked by the family to do a very few myself- helping to fold a flag with thirteen folds for the thirteen stripes on the flag, the thirteen original colonies and thirteen symbols.

The 1st fold of our flag is a symbol of life.

The 2nd fold -our belief in eternal life.

The 3rd fold is made in honor and remembrance of the veterans departing our ranks who gave a portion of their lives for the defense of our country to attain peace throughout the world.

The 4th fold represents our weaker nature, for as American citizens trusting in God, it is to Him we turn in times of peace as well as in time of war for His divine guidance.

The 5th fold is a tribute to our country

The 6th fold is for where our hearts lie

The 7th fold is a tribute to our Armed Forces, for it is through the Armed Forces that we protect our country

The 8th fold is a tribute to the one who entered into the valley of the shadow of death, that we might see the light of day.

The 9th fold is a tribute to womanhood, and Mothers

The 10th fold is a tribute to the father

The 11th fold represents the lower portion of the seal of King David and King Solomon and glorifies in the Hebrews eyes, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob

. The 12th fold represents an emblem of eternity and glorifies, in the Christians eyes, God the Father, the Son, and Holy Spirit.

The 13th fold, or when the flag is completely folded, the stars are uppermost reminding us of our nation's motto, "In God We Trust."

Presenting the flag to a spouse or parent or significant other, the representative says "The President of the United States and a grateful Nation presents this flag to you for your loved ones service." You give the flag with the flat side so you don't poke someone in the eye. On this Memorial Day all the graves of all our loved ones and those we never knew but someone loved are decorated. You don't have to be military.

I used to mow a cemetery in my home town when I was a teenager- all thirty-eight acres of it. When I finished, it was ready to mow again. I remember in a long growing season into November that near the wall of the cemetery, I found a broken gooey pumpkin on a grave. I was upset because of the mess and having to pick the smelly pieces with my bare hands. Then I looked on the grave stone and it was for seven year old girl who died on Halloween I was more upset than I had been about the

pumpkin. She was someone's little angel. I immediately went out and bought a fresh pumpkin to decorate her grave and never ever complained no matter how strange some decorations were which appeared in that cemetery on my watch. Love lasts longer than life.

The Welsh Poet Dylan Thomas writes: "Though we sink through the sea, we shall rise again and death shall have no dominion. Though lovers be lost, love is not, and death shall have no dominion." Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount "Blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted." We shall be comforted no matter how long it takes because "The Lord is good, his mercy is everlasting and his truth endures to all generations."