**Thank, Ask, Pledge (5-28-17)**

**Memorial Sunday**

Acts 1: 6-14 1 Peter 4: 12-14; 5: 6-11 John 17:1-11

**Responsive Reading**: Psalm 68: 1-10, 32-35

**Summary:** We honor patriots as we look back, as we live in the present for which heroes and heroines fought, as we struggle toward the future. We do this, looking to God Who was, and is, and is to be.

I tend to be a bit traditional when it comes to special Sundays, like this Sunday right before Memorial Day. I want to remember and honor heroes and heroines who have served in war and peace to protect and sustain the freedom we enjoy today. From my point of view, this tribute is grounded in God and involves thanking, asking, and pledging.

First, I thank God for providing the lives I honor. God made each of them and called them to service. Though their resources at the time may have seemed as weak as five smooth stones and a slingshot, God provided them with a faith in Him which proved more than sufficient against any Goliath. We think our resources have given us the victory and are too often to think we are self-made when nothing can be further from the truth.

There is a great joke which illustrates that point. A scientist comes before God and says, “We’ve learned so much in recent years that we don’t really need you.”

God replies, “OK, but I love you and want to make sure you can do without me. Make life the way I did in the old days from a pile of dirt.”

The scientist agrees to the challenge and bends down to scoop up a pile of clay. “Woah, hold on there,” God says, “You’ve got to get your own dirt!” Hum, maybe we still need Him. Our warrior examples in the fight against Satan clearly depended on God. “Why look where Jesus went?” the angels said, “He’ll be back.” So, those men and women gave us an example of serving on the front lines by devoting themselves to prayer. And the petition Jesus made in John 17 anticipated, not just those soldiers, but also those who would come to believe through them: namely us.

Along with thanking, there is also asking. We are thankful for strength, but must also ask to be forgiven and enabled to overcome our weakness. In every generation, we fall short of the ideal of one nation, under God with liberty and justice for all. Equality is still a goal and freedom fights daily against ignorance, apathy, and the mutual resistance of those divided by philosophy and approach.

The American Dream of prosperity and meaningful life for each and all is obstructed by those who want to ensure their liberty and profit by denying the same to others. This is not a time to fight each other, for the lion in our midst is not the brother or sister suffering the same trials. As Peter teaches, humility springs from being forgiven and thus learning to forgive and fight alongside each other. Our war heroes include Navaho code talkers right off the Rez, black Buffalo soldiers, and unrecognized gals in the Women’s Air Corps who built, tested, and flew delivery of planes they were not allowed use themselves. Asian Americans died fighting in the Pacific while their families were kept isolated in camps for fear they’d turn traitor. When it came to their wars, like the disciples, our soldiers knew we were in it together.

Finally, after thanking God and asking for forgiveness and help, I come to pledging to God as essential to an effective memorial. We honor our saints and patriots best when we surpass mere memory and continue the parade by enlisting with them in the present. We need to march, shoulder to shoulder, to confront an uncertain future with a certain faith. North needs to stop fighting South, and East’s enemy is not the West. Liberals are not insane snowflakes, nor are conservative’s necks invariably red.

Our problem is that we try so hard to control others when we cannot even control ourselves all that well. Politics is all rather like the two college students talking about how challenging it is to learn how to cook now that they are away from home. “I’ve got a great cookbook,” one said, ‘but I’ve never been able to do anything with it.”

“Is it too demanding?” asked the friend.

“Absolutely, came the response, “Every single recipe begins the same way – Take a clean dish.”

No nation or person can make the world behave. It was Beatrix Potter who had the better response when she wrote, “Believe there is a great power silently working all things for good, behave yourself and never mind the rest.”

So, instead of trading insults, let’s trade pledges. Memorial Sunday does not simply remember the past, it pledges allegiance to a future in which the crowns of power which every sect and nation seeks to attain are tossed at the feet of Jesus. We strive, we suffer, we resist – not each other – but the roaring Satan in our midst and pledge ourselves to God, Who will exalt us in due time.

To God, then, be the power, the glory, and the people, forever and ever. And the Church said: “Amen.”