

For All the Saints

By Rev. Sheryl Stewart

5-30-21 (Trinity & Memorial Day Sunday)

Isaiah 6:1-8

Romans 8: 12-17

John 3:1-17

Psalm 29

Summary: Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends.

The first thing I noticed as I looked at my church calendar was that today is not only a major national holiday, but also Trinity Sunday, an important focus for the Christian faith. I thought these themes would combine well.

Memorial Day usually focuses on our respect and gratitude for men and women in the armed services who have literally given their careers and lives to ensure our freedom. While the lectionary did not include Jesus' words about no man having greater love than one giving his life for his friends, this quote joins these themes perfectly.

Now, turning to the lectionary, our Hebrew Scripture shares a vision which Isaiah experienced. His initial terror at seeing God is because of the sinful distance which he and all humans experience before God. That fear is relieved. Right after Isaiah's healing, God asks whom He can send to share His Word. Isaiah promptly lays down the rest of his life to doing just that.

Right away, it is plain to see that it is not simply the armed services who have laid down their lives for our freedom. God's saints march with them like Christian soldiers fighting in a quite different sort of war. "For not with swords loud clashing nor roll of stirring drums, but with deeds of love and mercy, the heavenly kingdom comes." Or, as our preparation hymn puts it, "For all the saints who from their labors rest, who Thee by faith before the world confessed, Thy Name, O Jesus, be forever blest, hallelujah, hallelujah!"

Trinity Sunday celebrates God, our Creator and Father, Jesus, our Savior and friend, and the Holy Spirit, our inspiration and connection to the Divine. All those lives laid down for freedom combine as one battalion with those saints laying down their lives to advance Heaven's gospel. It becomes easy to see how these holidays might march to the beat of one drum.

We are grateful and honor the Trinity for calling, saving, and equipping this mighty army of souls offered for us. Paul takes that a step further and states that we are also under a personal obligation to the Trinity. We are created in our Father's image, enlisted by Jesus, and led by the Holy Spirit.

And this leads us to today's Gospel lesson. Nicodemus visits Jesus by night, likely because to do so in broad daylight would cause him trouble with his peers.

Jesus does not dismiss him for his timidity; rather, He seeks to enlist him. “You must be born again,” or “You must start your life over as a new person.”

We rarely focus on Nicodemus. Like most of us, he is a mixture of strength and weakness. He respects Jesus and seeks His help, yet he obviously fears the censure of his peers and visits Jesus in secret. Why is he not sent packing but given mercy instead? Because God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. Because God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world should be saved through Him.

So, when we sang, “For all the Saints,” we were not singing just about our war heroes and the prophets and servants who came before us. As Jim taught us in his Pentecost message, God thinks we are worthy, by His grace, to join this throng. Be enlisted. Be born again. With Jesus, lay down your lives for each other to the glory of the Trinity, who have created, enlisted, and equipped you. So, when we sing our closing hymn, praising God for great and famous men, all of us -- men and women of God -- are included. Let us be born again! Amen.