

Living Memorial

Psalm 8; Romans 5.1-5; John 16.12-15

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A Sermon Preached at the Larchmont Avenue Church

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It was a memorable sight, in the Memorial Day parade this past Thursday. Marching down Larchmont Avenue, right outside our door here at the church. Among the troops – the young Sailors and Marines, who came ashore into New York during Fleet Week and made their way to Larchmont, along with the procession of our local uniformed fire fighters and police, as well as the elected local officials . . .

There in the midst of the procession, all eyes fell upon a certain soldier in uniform who came marching by: a veteran -- a US Army veteran -- of World War II. Not riding in an open-air vehicle, as did the few other WWII vets in the parade. No, Corporal David Parker, came marching by himself – a brigade of one. Wearing the same Government Issued uniform which he had put on 65 years earlier, when he enlisted, when he was all of 19 years old!

David, as many of you know – and as I am proud to say and celebrate -- is my father-in-law. I have seen him in his uniform many times. As the experience of our family goes: if there is even the slightest comment in any discussion about THE WAR and David's military service . . . it is almost automatically noted that his uniform is hanging in the closet upstairs. And . . . that he can still fit into it. And, that he can do so right away. Which, not infrequently, actually happens . . . As David stays with our family here in Larchmont, and as this is such a wonderful community – in which David has become energetically involved with numerous activities, including the Memorial Day parade – well then, you can appreciate the steps which follow. . . . And they are very eager steps as David donned that uniform with great pride this week, and came stepping, marching along the parade route!

At the parade's beginning, as the marchers all cued up, those young sailors and Marines made way for David, reaching out – as each one did to the other – to say thanks. The much younger marchers: girls scouts and cub scouts and little leaguers, took special note – some staring -- at this grandfatherly figure. They had learned about his war. Some, in tow of moms and dads, stepped up to say thank you . . .

As did I, as David – Corporal Parker -- marched by on Larchmont Avenue. I don't often salute my father-in-law. But in those moments I did, with great pride.

As he marched on solitarily, one could not help but think of the others who have served alongside: those back then who fell in action, and those who have passed on since then – estimates are that presently 6000 WWII veterans per month are passing away.

And then today, in memoriam: Lest we forget . . . there have been 4500 war dead to date in Iraq. And this week, the number of US fatalities in Afghanistan reached 1000, not to

mention an estimated 100,000 Americans wounded . . . and not to mention those losses among those we call “enemy” and those who are not: those mere citizens caught in the violence . . .

The custom across many communities today, at Memorial Day -- which was the case when Memorial Day ceremonies began at Waterloo, New York, in 1866 -- is to read from Abraham Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address, noting the memory of those fallen on that spot and at other sites of combat.

In those words of Lincoln: “We are met on a great battle-field of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion . . . as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this. But, in a larger sense, we can not dedicate -- we can not consecrate -- we can not hallow -- this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us -- that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion -- that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain -- that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom -- and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.”

Lincoln’s words with regard to God, were more than rhetoric. That is, more than the convenient political inclusion of the divine. God as Sovereign – the likes of God that we find in this morning’s Psalm – our maker of heaven and earth. The one who establishes the moon and the stars and all of creation . . . and human beings – the psalm proclaims – “*human beings*” about whom God is *mindful*, knowing, with care for them – that is, love for us, each one . . .

And then – as the psalm echoes what we see in Genesis, in the creation story: God grants us, gives us, dominion – calling us to be partners (There’s that word again, as we said a bit ago with the kids). Giving us dominion, not dominance. To make peace, not war. Grace not greed. Care for creation, not exploitation – on a day when the earth is bleeding from the bottom of the Gulf of Mexico-- how many hundreds of barrels of oil, rendering lifeless how many brown pelicans, how many shrimp, how many herring, how many dolphins and whales, how much of the ecology and ecosystem desecrated . . .???

Still we are loved into being, created by God, (hear the psalmist’s words again), created in the image of God, “a little lower than God . . . crowned with glory and honor, given dominion over the works of God’s hands.”

“God who’s name is majestic in all the earth.” God, who Jesus says in the Gospel today, entrusts all that has been given to him . . . to us: Us, we humans about whom God cares . . . it is in our care for one another and the creation about us . . . the love for one another to

which Jesus calls us, that God is praised. When all of humanity cares for one another and for God's creation as God cares for us, that the name of God is majestic in all the earth."

May it be so.

Amen.