

A sermon preached by the Rev. Robert L. Hart, Easter 7, May 24, Acts 1: 15-17, 21-26, Psalm 1, I John 5: 9-13, John 17: 6-19

+In the Name of God who gave us life through his Son, Jesus Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

We live by two calendars. Sometimes we don't notice. Other times the two calendars coincide. On weekends like this one the calendar that governs the community of Christ, the Church, pays absolutely no attention to the secular calendar of our nation. Yet we as both Christians and citizens of the U.S. live inside both worlds.

The Church's calendar follows the New Testament. The Ascension of Christ took place forty days after Easter. That was last Thursday, Ascension Day. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost was fifty days after Easter. We'll keep that celebration next Sunday. Today, the Seventh Sunday of Easter lies in between and we hear in the Gospel Jesus pray for what the Holy Spirit will accomplish in us on Pentecost and forever afterward. "Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth."

Living inside the Church calendar at this time of year we follow the events that lead to the birth of the Church and the empowering of its mission. But as I said we also live within a secular calendar. And the world around us and we ourselves are observing Memorial Day. It's a day sacred to the nation and in honor of those who have served and died in the service of their country. If you take a close look around this church, you'll find we have not forgotten this side of our lives. The plaques behind both the pulpit and the lectern as well as the Chapel of St. Michael are dedicated to those who have served in the armed forces of this country.

It's an interesting tension living inside two calendars. The Church's calendar is universal. It has nothing to do with nations. These scripture readings will be heard in churches on this Sunday in lands whose Memorial Day is observed on some other day of the year. The Church's calendar lifts us out of the local and places us inside the Gospel.

Yet, the concerns of the two calendars can speak to each other. Jesus says we are sanctified, made holy, in truth. And what soldier ever went to war without hoping that his or her service was on behalf of some sliver of truth. Wars are bad business. They belong to what Jesus in the Gospel reading calls "the world." By that Jesus meant the world of human behavior, the world constructed on power, greed, and oppression. Every war arises out of the sin of the world. And every service man or woman desperately hopes that whatever they do might rescue a little hope and goodness for the future.

Some wars are simply unjust and wrong from beginning to end. Others are fought for a good purpose. The service of soldiers is often noble. War is not noble. The outcome of war is inevitably mixed. Any one who has fought wants only peace. I do believe my father who was a fighter pilot in WWII fought nobly and fought to secure for us and others a free world. My father was the first to tell you that it was a bad business. He saw and did things he would rather not have

had to do. He did what he knew was his duty to his country and for what he hoped would be the greater good of this tired earth. I bless him for it and all those who serve their country in this way.

We realize though that when Jesus prayed for us to be sanctified in truth and sent into the world, it was not to make war. It was to live in the truth of what he told us when he said, "God is love."

Jesus said in this morning's Gospel we as Christians are in the world but not of the world. He was guiding us to a realization. The world as human beings so often construct it and live it is what the ancient saying says, "a painted chariot for kings, a trap for fools, a bubble, a mirage. But the one who sees the truth goes free."

Jesus makes us holy in God's truth. Jesus sends us into this world not to serve the painted chariots of kings but to serve the truth that sets us free. The Spirit of God liberates us from the illusions of power, greed and violence.

Jesus also prays that we will have his joy and that this joy will be made complete within us. That joy is the gift of the Spirit, a joy that is grounded in love, free from hatred and is exercised in generosity. Jesus taught us to put aside anger, hatred, jealousy and greed. He sent us into this world to be a light, to speak of love, to seek justice and to live in peace.

Most of those who ever marched off to war never wanted anything different from what Jesus taught. They would fight if necessary but they desired to live. They envisioned a world of peace and justice. As Christians we are sent into the world by Christ not as soldiers but to serve what every human heart touched by God's Spirit ever wanted – the joy and life that is God's truest Gift.