

“Tell Them We Gave Our Today’s for Their Tomorrows”- John 15:1-17

In 1997 two boys in Winchester Virginia were using a metal detector in their backyard and discovered later that it was a live shell from the Civil War. Not knowing what it was they poked on it awhile but fortunately they called the police whose bomb squad came out and detonated the shell in their backyard. It made a hole four feet in diameter and five feet deep.

It is amazing then after 132 years that weapons can be still alive and cause destruction. Yet that is the nature of war. Its effects linger on in people’s lives for many generations. Many publications are publishing memories and effects of World War One because it is the 100 year anniversary. Many soldiers after World War Two could not talk about the war for years because of the trauma they saw and felt. Kay’s father was a truck driver for Patton who after the war went around to the concentration camps collecting survivors. It was almost 50 years before he could talk about it. My mother told me that my father had horrible screaming nightmares for years after the war as an infantry officer living in fox holes. My son David who was in Afghanistan for 11 months was profoundly affected by what he saw and experienced. There are things he cannot talk about even to this day.

Memorial Day is a time set aside every year to remember those who fought in the wars and did not come back. My grandmother use to call it Decoration Day because you went out to the cemetery and decorated the graves with flowers and memorabilia. The one’s Abraham Lincoln described in his Gettysburg Address as those, “who gave the last, full measure of devotion.” Memorial Day is an uncomfortable holiday. Not only are we confronted with the sacrifices made we are confronted by our response to those sacrifices. The idea of someone making a sacrifice for us let along dying for us makes us uneasy. This makes us stop and examine our own lives. Why did they do what they did and would we be willing to do the same.

It seems that today we are more into celebrities than we are into heroism. The TV is full of reality shows, like The Voice and American Idol and more are popping up every day. Everybody it seems wants their 15 minutes of fame or longer that will win them the lucrative contract so that they can be a celebrity.

Shows like Entertainment Tonight and other talk shows glamorize celebrities. But I love what historian David Boorstein wrote, “The hero reveals the possibilities of human nature. The celebrity reveals the possibilities of the press and media. Celebrities are people who make the news. Heroes are people who make history. Time makes heroes but dissolves celebrities.”

In John 15 Jesus taught very profound lessons to his disciples before he died. He talked about servant hood in the washing of the disciple’s feet. He talked about the joy of knowing that there was a place beyond this world and he is going to prepare that place for them. Jesus also gives a lesson on heroism. In John 15 Jesus teaches, “My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this that he lay down his life for his friends.”

The main word in this lesson is love. This is not the phileo, brotherly kind of love. This is more than just affection between people. This is more than a high five gentle hug kind of love. It is more than what is read in greeting cards. It is more than what the Beatles sang in 1970, “All You Need is Love”: A dreamy simple solution to the world’s problems. A kind of “can’t we just get along with each other”. After this song The Beatles broke up over differences. We throw the word love around quite lightly. More book, movies, and songs have been written about love that is conditional, that is finicky, and is very often short-term. But none of this is not what is being talked about in the gospel lesson.

This is sacrificial, unconditional kind of love. It is agape kind of love. It is a gift that comes directly from God. Jesus doesn’t just simply say, “Love one another”. He describes this love. It is interesting that in the Bible when the word love is used it is never the word phileo. Not once are we to have a “brotherly” kind of love for one another. But repeatedly we are commanded to have agape, a sacrificial kind of love. The greatest expression of this agape, this “lay down your life” kind of love was Jesus laying his life down for us. This kind of love that Jesus teaches us about is the kind of love that is joyous and bearing fruit building up the life of others.

At the end of the passage inverse 16, Jesus declared to his disciples and to us that we did not choose him but he chose us. This is the ultimate love. He

hounded us. He came after us. He wanted a love relationship with us. For the disciples that night it would be a reminder that even though things were about to unravel, they were embraced by a love that one day after the crucifixion and after the resurrection that they would understand. Knowing that Christ chose them would hold them in stead as they would encounter intense opposition.

In his autobiography, Colin Powell tells the story of Sam Donaldson a reporter from ABC news, interviewing a young private. "How do you think that the battle will go? Are you afraid?" The private answered, "We'll do okay... I'm not afraid because I'm with family." As he said this, he mentioned to the other soldiers sitting nearby. A few soldiers called out, "Tell him again. He didn't hear you." With even more assurance in his voice, the young man said, "This is my family we take care of each other." Do you think that the young private would be willing to lay down his life for those he called his family? Absolutely! Because he loved them, and he knew they loved him, he had the courage and commitment to do anything necessary to protect them. I love the war movies where the commanders tell the soldiers that no one will be left behind in battle. You see scenes where soldiers are carrying their wounded buddies and even those who died with them from the battle. This is deep committed love and care. This is the kind of love that Jesus taught that night to his disciples.

Imagine if we in the church had that kind of love for each other? Imagine if we could point to any member of the church and say, "That's my family, and we take care of each other." Imagine if we said that and could back up those words with loving, sacrificial action. That kind of love would have the power to change not only our church, but all of society. We would be unstoppable. And those around us who would witness our love for each other would have to say, "There is something different about those people. I want what they have." It is the love we celebrate today in the example of soldiers who gave up their lives for our freedom.

Pastor Edward Chinn writes, "In India there is a cemetery where the bodies of American soldiers are buried from World War II. Over the entrance to the

cemetery are these words, "Tell Them We Gave Our Today's for Their Tomorrows."

Let's never forget that our tomorrows were bought with a price. Someone had to pay with their lives, so that we might be free today. There is no way we can sufficiently say, "Thank You."