MEMORIAL DAY
05292022
JESUS' PRAYER
John 17:20-26 Text vs.20

John had a serious memory problem. One day he ran into a friend he hadn't seen for a long while and said, "Bill, do you remember what a bad memory I used to have?" "I sure do." "Well, it's not bad any more. I went to a seminar, and they taught me how to remember things. It was great! Now, I have a wonderful memory." "That's great!" Bill said. What's the name of the seminar?" "Uh, wait a minute. My wife went with me. I'll ask her." John turned, saw his wife standing nearby, then turned back and said, "Bill, what's the name of that flower with a long stem, that has thorns and a red bloom?" "You mean a rose?" "Yeah, thanks! . . . . Hey Rose, what's the name of that seminar we attended?"

But you know, there are times and events you should never forget! Memorial Day is one of them! Tomorrow is that day! In 1620, a small group of Christians called Pilgrims, set sail in a tiny boat from England to cross the North Atlantic to the New World. It was an English ship called the ***Mayflower***. About 90 feet in length, it had four decks, a bowsprit, foremast, mainmast and mizzenmast. Those Pilgrims had received permission from the Virginia Company of London to establish a colony in the northern part of Virginia where they would erect a church with the hope, they would be free and independent of the Church of England. After a difficult ten weeks at sea, the ***Mayflower's*** 102 passengers and crew of 30 sighted Cape Cod. Tradewinds had battered the little boat northward. They didn't want to land there. It was a cold November. It was forbidding, rough country. They dropped anchor November 11, 1620, near the southern tip of Massachusetts and debated, *"Should we try to get back to Virginia? Or should we just go ahead and settle here?"* They decided the ***Mayflower*** had had enough and probably wouldn't make it back to Virginia.

So, after more than 66 days at sea William Bradford and the ***Mayflower*** Pilgrims finally came ashore at Plymouth Rock, Nov. 21, 1620. A replica of the Mayflower is at anchor nearby today. But before they left the boat, they wrote what is known as *"The Mayflower Compact."* It begins with these words: *"In the name of God, we whose names are underwritten, having undertaken for the glory of God and advancement of the Christian faith, a voyage to plant a first colony in the northern part of Virginia, do now solemnly and mutually, in the presence of God and one of another, covenant and combine ourselves together."* Did you hear that*? "We have come here in the name of God!"* They came to the New World to glorify God! They came to advance the Christian faith! What they were saying was, "*We are unashamedly Christians. We are searching for a place where we can worship God the way we feel the Bible teaches us to worship Him."* Someone has said, *"The difference between North and South America is, the Spaniards went to South America in search of gold. The Pilgrims came to North America in search of God."*

The Pilgrims started building their settlement where a tribe of Wampanoag Indians had resided. Within years, the European settlers arriving on these shores would be reduced by up to 90 percent, killed by diseases they brought with them to the New World. Yes, the earliest foundations of our country *were spiritual foundations*. Our nation was built upon faith in God. With a commitment to God!

The custom of placing flowers on graves began May 5, 1866, near the end of the Civil War in Waterloo, NY. Gen. John Logan, then president of the Grand Army of the Republic declared that May 30th would be a day to decorate with flowers the graves of those *"who died in defense of their country during the late rebellion"*. Within a few years, the practice of placing flowers on military graves had spread throughout the North and the South.

After World War I ended in 1918, November 11th was set aside to honor all Americans who died in all wars. The custom was then extended in 1971 to pay tribute to deceased relatives and friends, both military and civilian. And Congress declared Memorial Day as a national holiday on which we remember our loved ones who have gone on before us. The most solemn ceremony conducted every Memorial Day is the placing of a wreath at the *Tomb of the Unknowns* in Arlington National Cemetery at Arlington, Virginia.

But today, people tend to be forgetful of what this day is all about. They need help remembering. What do people usually do on this weekend? They go on picnics. They go to the beach. They go fishing. They spend time with their families. They have cookouts. However, there are still a few who do "*remember*" in cemeteries across our nation to place flags on graves tomorrow. Groups of veterans' organizations, The Veterans of Foreign Wars and The American Legion, will do it. There will be prayers. Buglers will play taps. Families will gather to have private graveside prayers.

But Memorial Day just doesn't have the impact it once had! People don't observe Memorial Day like they once did. To them, Memorial Day has lost much of its meaning. But in the Bible, God has given many reminders of what's important! Belshazzar had a problem. It's the same problem many people have today. Belshazzar had forgotten some valuable lessons from the past. Lessons like his predecessor Nebuchadnezzar had learned the hard way. Lessons like, *"those who walk in pride, God is able to put down."* (Daniel 4:37). Daniel challenged the king accusing him; *"You have lifted*

yourself up against the Lord of Heaven." And that's exactly what Belshazzar was doing. Boasting about himself. He had picked right up where King Nebuchadnezzar left off by saying, *"Isn't this great? I have built Babylon by my mighty power for a royal dwelling for myself. And for the honor of my majesty?"* (Daniel 4:30) But, you know what they say? Pride always leads to a fall. Proverbs 16:18 declares, *"Pride goes before destruction. A haughty spirit before a fall."* And verse 18 links to verse 19 saying, *"Better to live humbly with the poor than to share plunder with the proud"*. The meaning of that passage is very clear. Pride leads to humiliation. It's better to be humble and poor, than to be proud and rich. Pride's right up there at the top of the list of things which God despises. Ask Satan. Ask Adam and Eve. Ask King David. Ask Simon Peter. Yes, *"Those who walk in pride, He is able to put down."* (Daniel 4:37)

In the past, America openly and unapologetically honored God. God's name was engraved in monuments all over Washington D.C. His Name is carved in granite on many government buildings. His name is printed on our currency. There was a time when we credited God with all our blessings. Our victories. And all our successes. We turned to Him in our trials. And in our losses.

But today, like Babylon, we have lost our sense of remembrance. All over our country we're tearing down monuments that help us remember our past. President Woodrow Wilson said it best: *"A nation that does not remember what it was yesterday, does not know what it is today. Or what it is trying to do. It's futile if we do not know where we came from. Or what we have been about."* Memorial Day, perhaps more than any other holiday, was born of human need. Deep inside every one of us lies a need to make sense out of life. To know our place in it. And in the world. To be thankful for what we have been given. What we will do with it. And what we will pass on to the next generation. It's all part of our unfolding history. It's like a chain that links one soul to another.

Abraham Lincoln wondered about that in the late fall of 1863. His darkest fear was that he might be the last president of the United States! The nation had become so involved in self-destruction, he described it as *"a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated can long endure"*. With those words Lincoln stood on the battlefield near Gettysburg, Pennsylvania on November 19th of 1863 and gave a speech that has become known as *Lincoln's Gettysburg Address*. It turned into what might be called the *first* observance of Memorial Day. Lincoln's purpose that day was to dedicate a portion of that battlefield at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, as a cemetery for the thousands of men who consecrated that soil with their blood in the sacrifice of battle. He said, *"That from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause in which they gave the last full measure of devotion, that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom."*

Now, 159 years later, the biggest battle we've ever faced is the battle for the very soul of our nation. That battle is being waged all around us. The erosion of our society over the past few years has been a slow process. Like a glacier. We couldn't see it moving! But now, we're seeing it speed up, rapidly. It's happening right before our eyes! It doesn't matter whether there's a Democrat or a Republican sitting in the Oval Office. This nation we know and love continues to erode. We're in this situation today, because of what we allowed yesterday. And the position we'll be in tomorrow, will be because of what we allow today.

It's time to listen to our Scripture lesson for today which is Jesus' prayer for His disciples, and for you, and me. Bow your head and listen to the words of Jesus. ***20*** *"I am praying not only for these disciples, but also for all who will ever believe in Me through their message.* ***21*** *I pray that they will all be one, just as You and I are one—as You are in Me Father, and I am in You. And may they be in Us, so that the world will believe You sent Me.* ***22*** *I have given them the glory you gave Me, so they may be one as We are One.* ***23*** *I am in them. And You are in Me. May they experience such perfect unity that the world will know that you sent Me. And that you love them as much as You love Me.* ***24*** *Father, I want these whom you have given Me, to be with Me where I am. Then they can see all the glory You gave Me, because you loved Me even before the world began!* ***25*** *O righteous Father, the world doesn't know You, but I do. And these disciples know you sent Me.* ***26*** *I have revealed You to them. And I will continue to do so. Then Your love for Me will be in them, and I will be in them."*

A few years ago, a 493-foot Wall was built in Washington D.C. and dedicated in 1982 on which were inscribed 57,939 names of those who had died in the Vietnam War from November 1st 1955, to the fall of Saigon on April 30th 1975. It says, **"**IN HONOR OF THE MEN AND WOMEN OF THE ARMED FORCES OF THE UNITED STATES WHO SERVED IN THE VIETNAM WAR. THE NAMES OF THOSE WHO GAVE THEIR LIVES AND OF THOSE WHO REMAIN MISSING ARE INSCRIBED IN THE ORDER THEY WERE TAKEN FROM US." Vietnam was perhaps the most controversial war in our nation's history. But regardless of what people thought about that war, that Wall reminds us that thousands of Americans sacrificed their lives in that far-off place for our freedom. Most were young people. They didn't want to die! They wanted to live! But their names are on that Wall!

One was a young man I'll never forget. Standing before his flag-draped coffin as a Navy Chaplain, I conducted his funeral. He was buried with military honors. The playing of taps. The three-volley gun salute representing duty, honor, and country. Then I handed the tri-folded American flag to his family. He was 19 years old!

All of us owe these young men and women a great debt of gratitude. Down through the years, in many wars, millions have sacrificed their lives for the cause of our freedom. So, it's fitting for us, as a nation, to remember them this Memorial Day 2022.

An evening news video showed a man standing next to the Vietnam Memorial Wall. His right hand was on the Wall gently touching someone's name etched into that Wall. Over and over again, he repeated these words: "He died for me. He died for me." Was it a brother? A father? A friend? We'll never know. But one thing is for certain---that man was visibly moved by the sacrifice of another man!

Let's make tomorrow a day to remember. To remember all the dead, from all wars. To remember our nation. To remember our loved ones who have gone before.

And especially, let us remember every day, that Jesus Christ died for us all. That is how we have come to know love. Jesus gave his life for us. This truly is a Memorial Day! AMEN