A Call to Honor & Remember

John 15:12-13

5/29/22

It’s been said that Memorial Day Weekend is the “unofficial” kick off to summer. Many have headed out to the dry lakes to camp. Many will prepare hamburgers and hot dogs and for some they’ll start the journey back from where they “mini vacationed” for the long weekend, but most of us will just enjoy the extra day off work & school.

This morning I want to break from the normal and share with you the reason this weekend should be a whole more than our plans, and why we should take a moment and reflect on why we celebrate Memorial Day.

Isaiah 46:9(a) says *“Remember your history, your long and rich history...”* The problem is that this generation and others before have forgotten that the freedom we have today, though it comes under fire in some political arenas, was not “free”! Thus, the reason we should always fight for the freedom we have in this great nation!

Being removed from the

* Civil War for 157 yrs
* WW1 for almost 104 yrs
* WW2 77 yrs
* Vietnam 47 yrs
* Gulf War 31 yrs
* Iraq War 11yrs
* Afgan War – 1yr

...we have generations that because of they don’t agree with the reason of war, their political views, and just because have forgotten what it cost for them to think and have those opinions!

It’s a sad and horrible, that even our schools are all but removing important parts of our history and the lives that have been given to where we are today.... You see, freedom always costs someone something...Always!

This is the day/weekend we remember those who gave the ultimate sacrifice – their life for our freedom. Jesus said, “*Greater love has no one than this; that one lay down his life for his friends.” (John 15:13*) I want us to think about these words this today and tomorrow because this is the exact reason, we are celebrating Memorial Day tomorrow.

Memorial Day is an American holiday, observed on the last Monday of May, honoring the men and women who died while serving in the U.S. military. Originally known as Decoration Day, it originated in the years following the Civil War but didn’t become an official federal holiday until 1971.

* The Civil War, which ended in the spring of 1865, claimed more lives than any conflict in U.S. history and required the establishment of the country’s first national cemeteries.
* By the late 1860s, Americans in various towns and cities had begun holding springtime tributes to these countless fallen soldiers, decorating their graves with flowers and reciting prayers.
* In 1966 the federal government declared Waterloo, New York, the official birthplace of Memorial Day. Waterloo, which first celebrated the day on May 5, 1866, was chosen because it hosted an annual, community-wide event, during which businesses closed and residents decorated the graves of soldiers with flowers and flags.
* Memorial Day, as Decoration Day gradually came to be known, originally honored only those lost while fighting in the Civil War. But during World War I the United States found itself embroiled in another major conflict, and the holiday evolved to commemorate American military personnel who died in all wars. In 1968 Congress passed the Uniform Monday Holiday Act, which established Memorial Day as the last Monday in May in order to create a three-day weekend for federal employees; the change went into effect in 1971. The same law also declared Memorial Day a federal holiday.

My Grandfather was in the Air Force; however, many people have not served in the military and many, not just young people, do not understand the need or again have forgotten the need to remember those who have died serving this country. This morning I want to share 3 stories with you to help you understand the commitment required when someone chooses to enlist in the military and possibly make the ultimate sacrifice to save others. For those of you who have never served, it’s important for you to know that when you enlist in the military you choose to give up some of the freedoms that you have as a civilian. As a civilian you can come and go as you, please. As a military person, you come and go as you are told. It is a true statement that your family life comes second to your military life. Being in the military and/or a family member of someone serving on active duty requires an understanding that the needs of “Uncle Sam” outweigh the needs of your family in some situations. I want you to keep this in mind as you listen to a few stories, I will share this morning because in my opinion, these stories fulfill what Jesus said in John 15:13.

* Army Specialist Ross McGinnis saved the lives of four fellow soldiers on patrol when his vehicle was attacked in Northeast Baghdad on Dec. 4, 2006. While McGinnis was manning the .50-caliber machine gun on top of the vehicle, an insurgent threw a fragmentation grenade inside. McGinnis, yelled "grenade ... it's in the truck!" At this moment, he had the choice to either jump out of the vehicle or cover the grenade and prevent others from injury. Without hesitating, he jumped on the grenade. McGinnis' platoon sergeant, Cedric Thomas, recounts how he saw McGinnis quickly "pin down" the grenade. Thomas said, "He had time to jump out of the truck ... he chose not to." McGinnis, a private first class at the time, was later promoted to specialist. Doing what he did was a matter of kindergarten math, McGinnis' parents said. "The right choice sometimes requires honor." He was 19 years old and was awarded the Medal of Honor on June 6, 2008.

The next 2 stories are of individuals who died in the War in Vietnam. I would love to visit the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall in Washington, D.C. If you have visited it, you would find the names of Fred Traylor & Matthew Leonard inscribed on black granite walls with the names of more than 58,000 other Americans who gave their lives or remain missing in action. The Memorial is dedicated to the “courage, sacrifice and devotion to duty and country” of all who answered the call to serve during the longest war in U.S. history. The creation of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in 1982 was an important step in national healing after one of America’s most divisive wars. Here are the 2 stories of these brave men.

* Marine Corporal Fred Traylor, while serving in Vietnam on June 17, 1969, was on a search and destroy mission in the area of Dong Ha. The marines soon found themselves receiving heavy fire and pinned down by enemy forces. Corporal Traylor fearlessly volunteered to assist in evacuating his companions from positions dangerously exposed to enemy fire. As he maneuvered across hazardous terrains towards the wounded marines, he was killed by the detonation of a mortar round. He was killed while attempting to save his fellow marines. He was 20 years old.
* Sergeant First Class Matthew Leonard was serving in Vietnam when his platoon was ambushed by enemy forces. After his platoon leaders were injured, Sergeant Leonard led his men in a charge against the enemy and erected a defense perimeter around their location. When one of the men in his platoon was injured and was outside of the defense perimeter, Sergeant Leonard left his position to get him. In doing so he was wounded but refused treatment knowing that he was now in charge of the platoon. During the heated battle, Sergeant Leonard charged the enemy’s machine gun position and was able to capture the gun and defeat the crew even though he had been shot several times. With multiple wounds in his body, he continued to fire upon the enemy. He died propped up against a tree still firing his weapon at the enemy forces.

There are many men and women who have died in wars, so that we can wake up and have the freedom to do whatever it is we choose to do on a given day. For our freedom, our religious freedom! Though it’s being tested, we live in a democracy today because we have men and women who have fought and died in wars to maintain it. Today we continue to enjoy our freedom because of the men and women serving in our military. I do not know about you, but Memorial Day weekend shouldn’t just be another three-day weekend that officially kicks off summer, a weekend where we cook out, or just get a sunburn, but it should be a weekend of remembering those who gave their life for something greater than themselves.

During the Civil, Vietnam and even the Iraq War, many soldiers died fighting for a country that did not appreciate them. Soldiers returned home to persecutions for serving in unpopular wars. Imagine being one on the front lines fighting for a global cause only to return home to be persecuted by those who never served. That does something to a person. No matter your political view, your religious view, or your opinion...there should be, no check that, needs to be a thankfulness to God and an appreciation for our military today. I only wish we really appreciated them as the heroes they are and not just with a medal or a three-day weekend, but with the utmost respect, true appreciation and community support.

Jesus said, “Greater love has no one than this; that one lay down his life for his friends.” (John 15:13) The couple stories we heard today are examples of men who laid down their lives for someone else. And they were young people. As I read their stories, I can’t help but believe they had dreams and plans for what they would do when they returned home. I can’t help but believe they had or desired families and children of their own. They had things they wanted to achieve in life. And yet, when it came down to making a decision, they forfeited it all for those they served with. In one way or another they gave their life to save another.

Although this message is about those making the ultimate sacrifice while serving in our military, I want to close this morning with a few special individuals who made the sacrifice while not serving in the military.

* Courage like Zaevion Dobson, a 15 year-old Fulton High School football player in Tennessee, who made a split-second decision protect three teenage girls around him versus running away and saving himself. He died while using his body to shield three teenage girls from two gunmen.
* Or Kiera Larsen, a 10 year-old 4th grader, killed while saving her two neighbor’s children. She saw a SUV coming down a hill towards her friends and instead of yelling for them to move, she ran in front of the SUV and shoved them out of the way sacrificing her life to save theirs.

Closing:

There’s 1 more person that sacrificed everything for you...Jesus. Jesus sacrificed His life for all of mankind. He didn’t just use lip service and “say” this is the greatest show of love that a person can show towards someone else. No... He exemplified it on the Cross! Rather than saving himself and coming down from the cross, He gave His life, so that you might have life and life abundant! He shed His blood so that you would not have religious freedom, or even political freedom, but that you’d have spiritual freedom and eternal life with Him in Heaven!

Church, it takes a love for others to give your life in order to save someone else. The stories you’ve heard today all have an element of someone sacrificing themselves for others, whether it was while they were wearing a uniform, were a civilian, or was the True and Righteous Son of God – the choices were the same; save themselves or save others.

You see, the flag and the cross represent “freedom” and that freedom cost life to pay for it!

On this Memorial Day can we choose to remember two things.

* First and foremost, Jesus gave His life to save us. He did that because of love. It is this love that He instills within us that helps us to make those same decisions to love others!
* Secondly, while there is a lot of negativities in our world today, I want you to remember that there are still people who are willing to put others ahead of themselves.
  + Philippians 2:3 says, “*Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves.*”

You see, these 2 things, the flag and the cross represent “freedom”. If you choose to remember these 2 things, then you will begin to understand why the decisions made in the stories I shared today were made, and why moving forward we should always remember to reflect on the sacrifices they gave were not in vain as we live to “Honor & Remember” them not just on Memorial Day, but every day we live.