

Veteran's Day 2018

11/11/18

"Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go." (Joshua 1:9)

Today is Veteran's Day... a day on which we honor and esteem those who have served in the military in order to uphold the values we cherish and keep us safe and protected. It is officially observed November 11 of every year in recognition of the armistice between Germany and the allied forces of World War I: on the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month of 1918. Although this is when the fighting ceased, the war was not officially ended until the Treaty of Versailles was signed on June 28, 1919.

The first celebration of Armistice Day was on November 11, 1919, and an Act of Congress made it a legal holiday on May 13, 1938. On June 1, 1954, Congress approved a name change from Armistice Day to Veteran's Day, to honor all veterans wherever and whenever they had served. In 1971 a bill was enacted that moved the date of Veterans Day to the fourth Monday in October, but in 1975 this was reversed by Gerald Ford so that from 1978 onward the date for the celebration would be November 11.

Veterans Day is about recognizing and celebrating heroism. I suppose there are various aspects of that word. But I think Philippians 2:3-4 gives us a perspective that makes sense to me: *"Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to*

his own interests, but also to the interests of others.” To face adversity on behalf of someone else is heroism. To look beyond our own interests, our own tribulations and seek to aid in someone else’s challenge is heroism.

I read a story about a veteran father speaking to his son, just prior to being deployed to Iraq. The son said that he was scared, and his father said this: “Son, you would be silly not to be scared. Being over cautious is what keeps most soldiers alive. Remember that courage is not the absence of fear, but the willingness to face it. It is my opinion that every soldier is already a hero. People who join the military know that someday, sooner or later, they will face conflict. That is heroism.”

Today’s young men and women who serve this country are courageous, and I agree with the father in this story: each of them is a hero. Each is willing to put their life on the line; each is willing to defend our nation by paying the fullest measure of devotion to their country.

Just as the vets from WWI, WWII, Vietnam War, Korean War, Bolivia, Cambodia, Zaire, Lebanon, Grenada, The Gulf, Desert Storm, Iraq, Tobruk, Panama, Sudan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Somali, Bosnia, Haiti, Kosovo, Syria, Yemen, Darfur, Boko Haram, Libya, and Uganda, the young men and women who serve today have chosen to go to war so you and I could have the freedom to come to church today. It is this willingness and courage that I so much appreciate, and as I have grown older, I

have come to appreciate more the courage it takes for a person to step forward and volunteer to serve the nation.

When I was a young man, the Vietnam War was in full rage. We did not have a totally volunteer army in those days; people were also drafted. When more recruits were required, we were assigned a number and we waited for our number to be called. My number was never called, so I was fortunate and was able to finish school and begin my life as an adult.

But I had friends who were drafted, and whose lives were put on hold, and some whose lives were never the same after they returned home to an unappreciative country. Some of these returning veterans, some of whom were my friends, were called names and shown disdain.

I never really understood why this was so, why people would blame the soldiers for doing their duty, for following their commander's orders, and implementing the plans that the leaders of our nation created. The contempt that was served up to these returning soldiers helped form my attitudes about life.

I often reflected on those times as I grew older and knew that it was just luck, or the Grace of God, that I was not one of those young men. Regardless, it made me more appreciative of the sacrifice that the military men and women must make in order to secure our liberties.

As I grow older still, my appreciation only increases. I see more clearly the necessity for a military. As much as I envision and pray for world peace, we are not yet ready as a species to join hands and claim our oneness. We are not yet ready to spread love and tolerance to the people of our own nation, least of all the entire globe.

There are still factions, both domestic and foreign, that adhere to an aggressively tribal philosophy. Groups intend harm on other groups that think differently. They hide from the Christ within that expresses as love and unity. Until these lower urges are controlled, laws and systems must remain in place to protect those who are willing to live peacefully as a nation and as residents of earth.

Today, as it has been for many years now, we have an all volunteer military, and the stresses and considerations for becoming part of the military are even greater than in my day.

When I was a young man, we had no choice. Today, it takes profound courage to leave the loved ones, the family, the children, and the established life in order to join the armed forces. John 15:13 states, 'Greater love has no one than this – that he lay down his life for his friends.' These good folks are heroes, all of them – for the willingness to pay the greatest price they can offer.

I think this nation has grown since the Vietnam era: we appreciate our soldiers more today. But we have a long ways to go. Up to 20% of the returning veterans suffer from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, or PTSD, not just because of what they experience in

war but because of the isolated and disconnected society they come home to. They no longer have the bond, or sense of connection and closeness, that they had with their comrades. Returning to a life of individualism and loneliness that Western society embraces makes it more difficult to recover from the traumas of war.

Returning soldiers are ripped from a close-knit family where they ate, slept, dreamed, shared, and fought together as one unit, and are thrust back into a lonely isolated life of alienation. In the book “Beyond Post-Traumatic Stress: Homefront Struggles with the Wars on Terror,” authors Sarah Hautzinger and Jean Scandlyn claim that veterans who return to a closely-knit community of friends, family, and buddies fare better psychologically than those who come back to live in a more isolated culture.

In addition to psychological adjustments, veterans confront issues that we don't always understand: they face the challenge of preparing to enter the workforce and finding a job; reinserting themselves into a family, creating structure appropriate to this new environment, adjusting to the overwhelming choices of necessities such as food, clothing, and free time. They must learn to find doctors, dentists, life insurance, and adjust to an entirely different pace of life. We cannot understand the veteran's perspective until we have tried to see life through their eyes.

Then there are still prejudices that returning veterans face, and expectations that they are somehow more capable of living again in a society than they are prepared for. We don't understand that they have lived for these years as part of a team, a family, close

ensemble of trusting and being trusted for their very lives. They look upon the members of their squad and platoon with respect and dignity; they rely on each and work together for the safety of each other.

Even bees have this innate ability to work together for the whole. On a warm day about half the bees in a hive stay inside beating their wings while the other half go out to gather pollen and nectar. Because of the beating wings, the temperature inside the hive is about 10 degrees cooler than outside. The bees rotate duties and the bees that cool the hive one day are honey gatherers the next.

This is one of the lessons that veterans can teach us: to count on each other, to trust each other, and work together. It's not all about individualistic efforts.

I truly see this nation as a team, and we each have our part to play. I like the metaphor of the geese and teamwork. You may have heard this before, and it bears repeating. Charles Swindoll shared four lessons from the V-shape flight pattern that geese use.

1. Those in front rotate their leadership. When one lead goose gets tired, it changes places with one in the wing of the V-formation and another flies point.
2. By flying as they do, the members of the flock create an upward air current for one another. Each flap of the wings literally creates an uplift for the bird immediately following. One author states that by flying in a V-formation, the whole flock gets 71 percent greater flying range than if each goose flew on its own.

3. When one goose gets sick or wounded, two fall out of formation with it and follow it down to help and protect it. They stay with the struggler until it's able to fly again.

4. The geese in the rear of the formation are the ones who do the honking. I suppose it's their way of announcing that they're following and that all is well. For sure, the repeated honks encourage those in front to stay at it. As I think about all this, one lesson stands out above all others: it is the natural instinct of geese to work together. Whether it's rotating, flapping, helping, or simply honking, the flock is in it together...which enables them to accomplish what they set out to do.”

What a powerful lesson this story teaches us. Whether we are looking at ourselves as a family, a community, as a State, as a Nation, or as a world unit – we are in this together. The military has its purpose as peace keepers and protectors, and we can be the honkers from the back, expressing our appreciation and support. No group of people are more cognizant of the power of a team and unity than are our veterans.

I know that within each of us, whether Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, Jewish, or Hindu, the Christ is ready to express as harmony, oneness, love, joy, and peace. Our challenge as human beings is to let go of our smallness and division -- our limited, fearful, tribal feelings and thoughts.

We are all in this together, and we each have a part to play. I pray that each of us can live a life of working together no matter our role. I pray that we live a life that is strong and of good courage, in

order to resist our lower urges of hatred and disrespect. I pray that we live a life that acknowledges God and expresses heroism in every situation.

Yes, we thank our veterans for freedom. But in the words of Peter Marshall, “Let us not think of freedom as the right to do as we please, but as the opportunity to do what is right.” And to paraphrase George S. Patton, let us not just mourn the men and women who have died, but let us thank God that such men and women have lived at all.

As the nation pauses today and tomorrow to observe Veterans Day, let us give thanks for our 22 million military veterans, thanking God for their sacrifice, dedication, and service to country. Let us pray for those who struggle with disabilities and pain, whether physical, emotional or spiritual, and ask God to bring powerful healing and renewal. Let us pray for the families of these individuals and pray that each one will know the gratitude of a thankful and united nation.

Let us pray....

The Red Poppy has become a symbol of remembrance for Veterans Day. It is said to be worn on the right side of the lapel, positioned at 11:00 o'clock. One tradition claims the red represents the blood of all who gave their lives; the black represents the mourning for those who did not have their loved ones return home to them; and the green leaf represents the grass and crops growing and the future prosperity after the war destroyed so much.