

Acts 17:22-31

²²Then Paul stood in front of the Areospagus and said, "Athenians, I see how extremely religious you are in every way. ²³For as I went through the city and looked carefully at the objects of your worship, I found among them an altar with the inscription, 'To an unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. ²⁴The God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by human hands, ²⁵nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mortals life and breath and all things. ²⁶From one ancestor he made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live, ²⁷so that they would search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him—though indeed he is not far from each one of us. ²⁸For 'In him we live and move and have our being'; as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we too are his offspring.' ²⁹Since we are God's offspring, we ought not to think that the deity is like gold, or silver, or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of mortals. ³⁰While God has overlooked the times of human ignorance, now he commands all people everywhere to repent, ³¹because he has fixed a day on which he will have the world judged in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead."

John 14:15-21

¹⁵"If you love me, you will keep my commandments. ¹⁶And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. ¹⁷This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you. ¹⁸"I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. ¹⁹In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. ²⁰On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. ²¹They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them."

The Principle That Guides Us

Tomorrow, as you hopefully know, is Memorial Day. As the name implies, Memorial Day is a day that we remember people, specifically people who died while serving in the armed forces. The latest count of those who died in wars has that total at about 1.3 million. About half of those occurred during the Civil War, so it's hardly surprising that Memorial Day was declared a national holiday shortly after that war ended. Also not surprising is that the North and South celebrated the event in different ways in the decades following the war – the South commemorating their war dead and the North celebrating theirs. Over the years the bitter divisions between North and South have been fading, and today Memorial Day is about honoring ALL the dead of ALL the wars.

But Memorial Day is an endangered holiday. Officially the holiday is celebrated on May 30th, but since the Uniform Monday Holiday Act took effect around 1970 the holiday has been part of a three-day weekend which marks the beginning of the summer holiday season. As you know, or might have guessed the Uniform Monday Holiday Act was

designed for the convenience of our labor force in order to give people a long weekend rather than a day off in the middle of the week, the theory being that it was more convenient to “get away” if you had an extra day off of work. This makes logical sense, but you must see the tragedy of this; we reschedule a holiday that’s about honoring the dead for the convenience of the living. The consequence has been that fewer people spend any time honoring the dead and instead head to beaches and amusement parks to entertain themselves. It’s no wonder that veteran’s organization such as the VFW and the Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War have lobbied to have the holiday switched back to May 30th so that people will perhaps spend more time doing what they’re supposed to do on the holiday: honor those who died serving this country in times of war.

Because if people spend time honoring those who gave their lives in service to their country, they may spend time considering *what* those brave men and women died *for*. True, they died for their country, but what does that mean? Was it the land they died for? Was it a particular *people* they died for? Confederate soldiers may have died for their land, but most of those brave men and women died for important *principles*. Lincoln may have argued at first that he was waging this war with the South to keep the union together, but the reason the South seceded in the first place had to do with the threat posed to a way of life that relied upon human slavery, and the war ended with the full emancipation of all slaves for all time. Some have referred to the Civil War as the second American Revolution that finished what the first revolution failed to accomplish. The point I’m trying to make is that we are a nation bound together not by pedigree but by principles. The American blood spilled during warfare was Hispanic blood, Caucasian blood, African blood, Asian blood, South American blood, and Australian blood, and most of that blood was spilled within our own borders as Americans fought other Americans over principles. The blood that was spilled overseas was blood spilled to defend our borders because people believed in those principles and were willing to give up everything for those principles. In fact those principles are so important to us that we would risk our lives defending people across the world when tyrants ignore those principles.

Think about that for a minute: how many men and women made the ultimate sacrifice for principles, and how many more were willing to do so. To those of you who have never been called to military service, ask yourselves if you would be willing to put your life on the line for principles. Would you do it? Perhaps you would – many of you have taken on vocations that require you to put your life on the line over principles; you appreciate the gravity of such a decision. That’s the sort of thing we should think about on Memorial Day. Put yourself into the shoes, or boots, of those who marched and fought and died in service to a country founded on principles, on ideals. That’s what we need to consider on Memorial Day – people of principle putting their lives on the line for those principles and dying for them. Then we need to look at ourselves as the benefactors of their sacrifices; the freedoms we enjoy, the safety we experience, the good life we live, did not come without a price, a price that was paid by millions who came before us. The *least* we can do is spend a day honoring those men and women who died for those principles. Thank God for the people who place the flags on the graves of our service members on this day – I encourage you to take a walk through our cemetery and appreciate the number service members who rest here. Each one had a story. Each one faced danger most likely beyond anything we’ll ever face. We don’t

know the details of those events, but we can imagine, and we should thank each one of them for the sacrifice they made.

For Christians, Sundays are not unlike Memorial Day, in both positive and negative ways. Sundays are actually holidays – holy days – when we should remember the sacrifice that Jesus made for us, how he offered his life up for us out of divine love. Unfortunately Sundays have gone the way of Memorial Days for many Americans; the focus has shifted from honoring others to pleasing ourselves. Sundays are more about entertaining ourselves than about honoring Jesus. Sunday morning becomes the time we can sleep off Saturday nights, and Sunday afternoons offer us a last chance to hit the beach or the malls or the parks before having to go back to work on Monday. Yet if we could take time on Sunday to put ourselves in Jesus' shoes, or sandals, to remember what he did, what he taught us in his life, how he healed the sick, how he forgave sinners, how he rebuked the hypocrites, how he *loved* us, we may start spending our Sundays the way they are supposed to be spent – honoring Jesus. That's part of what worship is about – honoring him for his sacrifice and his courage and his love.

But we can't go to Jesus' tomb to honor him on Sundays, because the tomb is empty. That's the biggest difference between Memorial Day and Sunday; Jesus is alive. Christ is risen. I think this is the main distinction between those who worship in church weekly and those who come once or twice a year; those who come weekly believe that Jesus is alive while those who come on Easter and Christmas are coming to memorialize Jesus as if he were dead. Don't get me wrong; I'm glad they come to honor Jesus, and I dare say that if they fail to recognize that Jesus is alive then the Churches they are seeing are not bearing much witness to a living Christ.

As a church, our mission is to bear witness to the Risen Christ. What does that mean? It means that each of us, must have, in our own way, experienced Jesus, probably not the way the eleven disciples experienced Jesus as he walks into a room and eats a meal with us; most of us I think are more like Paul; we saw something or heard something or *felt* something that no one else around us saw or heard or felt, and whatever it was gave us enough faith to show up here right now. You know joining a church is a lot like joining a group of folks who witness UFOs; you have this shared experience, and you come in part to be with others who have shared it, just so you know you're not alone, that you're not crazy. Somehow, Jesus Christ has manifested himself in your life, and you need the others to help validate that experience.

But if all we did was validate one another's experience, we'd be a pretty miserable group. All we could do would be tell our stories and wait for new people to come and share their story, and sit around and hope that we have another experience so we could tell others about it. Thank God our experience of the Risen Savior is not simply in the past. Jesus sent us the Holy Spirit which is none other than the presence of Christ himself – remember Jesus says, "I am with you, even to the end of the age." Jesus has not left us orphaned, but continues to lead us by way of the Holy Spirit, which is like the principle this that inspires us to serve our country. His presence is constant, and the church bears witness to that; a church doesn't have communal worship on Sundays in order to invoke Christ's presence; we worship because of Christ's presence. We serve our community and one another because of God's presence, in the Holy Spirit. And if we

fail to worship and we fail to serve it's only because Christ's presence is not really with us.

You come to this church hungry, not for doughnuts or cranberry almond coffee cake, but for the Risen Christ, and whether you stay or go depends upon whether you meet him here or not, because if you don't meet him here I know that there are many other churches where you will meet him. So come here knowing that Christ *is* present, and worship and glorify him as the Risen Savior. And when you leave this place, know that Christ's presence goes with you always.