

MAY 25, 2019 SERMON - JOHN TSCHUDY

SCRIPTURE LESSON REVELATION 21:22-22:5, JOHN 14:23-29

Back when I was in high school there was a time when some congregations pushed to no longer celebrate Memorial Day and indeed many still don't play it. Memorial Day almost became another casualty of the conflict over the Vietnam War. I am somewhat surprised how many people have forgotten those days, the pain they caused to people and how divided the country was. Here 50 years later while it has become acceptable to celebrate Memorial Day it is often in trivial ways, marking the beginning of the vacation or tourist season. The lessons it was created to teach us and remind us of are often forgotten. Memorial Day was created to remind us of the cost of war whether right or wrong, not celebrate it. Remember it was originally called "Decoration Day" as a day for decorating the war dead graves or later the graves of Veterans. There are different stories about how it started but the fact that it came out of the Civil War is pretty clear. That war which is probably the first of the modern wars and the only one fought in this country. It brought home to the majority of American homes the cost and terror of war. The new art of photography is credited with showing Americans the horror of war by showing pictures of the bodies and cut off arms and legs. It was so effective, public exposure to such pictures was controlled by the government, in later wars. Until Viet Nam when the new technology of TV brought the same types of pictures into every American home and began to turn the nation against the war. Look how many Americans are in combat around the world and how little coverage it gets. We aren't even allowed to see the returning bodies lest we begin to question the value of the combat and our involvement.

In Revelation the description of John's vision of the New Jerusalem continues with the picture of peace and light. God is at the center of the city so there is no need for a temple, or for that matter church buildings for people to fight over because God is there in person and can be worshiped directly. The tree of life is producing fruit to "Heal the nations." The vision of the end of time is a time when people can live together in peace, no matter who or what they are. The people come to worship God without concern for doctrine or proper ritual being defined. It is praising God and giving glory to God that is the important thing for all to do as the servants of God.

Again this week in the Gospel Jesus reminds us of what it means to follow him and keep his word. It is when we love each other in the way that God loves us that we keep the word of God in Jesus Christ. It is when we show love for God and each other, that God is with us. We have been sent the Holy Spirit to remind us of the message of God's words within us and the meaning of them as we live in this world. Peace in the world comes not from war but from faith and accepting of God's love for all of God's people. It is important for us to remember the terrible cost our refusing to live according to God's will costs and how we are called to live according to Christ's words of love for all.

As we celebrate Memorial Day this year our news reminds us of the ideas and political attitudes that the people we honor this weekend fought and some died to defeat have become acceptable again. Some of the people we honor died fighting against the idea that one race is superior to others and deserves to rule all others. Or that because of their religious beliefs it is acceptable to take away the God given rights of people, even to such things as liberty and life. I personally have felt the blast and seen the damage done by a van loaded with explosive being set off in protest to destroy a building. I have seen another building burned down out of anger and in protest and had my life changed by such acts. As I told our conference minister seeing police in riot gear is not a new thing for me. I remember one summer night when I was sitting on the front steps of the house talking with two of my friends I hadn't seen for a long time, when the spotlight on a patrol car hit us and we were told to disperse. Now I see these things returning.

God is offering us a different way but we have to hear and believe God's word and respond by loving each other and putting aside our personal agendas often based on fear and anger. This Memorial Day we need to honor those who have served this country, especially those who have suffered injury or death in that service. We honor them most by having the courage and faith to stand up to the forces of self-centered greed, anger and falsehood and trust in God and the Holy Spirit to guide us into making this world more like the world that is come.