

Sermon for November 10, 2019 – “The Birdcage”

Veteran’s Day – Texts: Ruth 1:6-19; John 15:9-17

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If you’ve ever been to our nation’s capital you know well that it’s packed with memorials that remember and shed light on the immense sacrifices that our Armed Forces have made to protect this country. They include the National World War II Memorial, the Korean War Veterans Memorial, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, and memorials to the various branches of the military. But there are still others. There’s the American Veterans Disabled for Life Memorial and, of course, Arlington National Cemetery, both of which offer a powerful reminder of the true costs of war. All of these places offer examples of the sacrifice that so many have made on behalf of their country. And as those who live under the canopy of freedom provided by those who’ve made that sacrifice, we are grateful but most of us have no idea what our military personnel go through. One soldier wrote that, even at home there’s no such thing as a “normal” duty day. Men and women put in long hours often at the expense of family time to do what needs to be done. Deployments take soldiers, sailors, airmen, and Marines to combat zones around the globe for months at a time. Members of the armed forces understand that they may be called upon to make the supreme sacrifice, to give up their lives in the defense of their country and the values it holds dear.

People in all professions are called upon to exhibit a high degree of responsibility. This means we must accomplish what we’re expected to do. Sacrifice takes this concept one step further. It involves giving up something we value for the sake of something that has a more pressing claim on our time or attention. Sacrifice is a word that is not unfamiliar to God’s people and it doesn’t always mean giving up one’s life. It does, however, involve giving in an uncommon way and sacrificial giving is at the very heart of stewardship. The word sacrifice itself comes from the from Latin word “sacrificium” which is taken from “sacer,” meaning “sacred” or “holy”, and “faciō” meaning “to do” or “to make.”

The story of Ruth, part of which we heard this morning provides an example of a young woman willing to sacrifice her independence to care for her mother-in-law. The writer of the letter to the Hebrews adds a summary of heroes of the faith who gave their all and in some cases their lives for the Lord. Ten of Jesus’ disciples did in fact give their lives for the sake of the gospel. Of course, we need look no farther than Jesus Himself as one who taught us the true nature of stewardship, as One who showed us the true meaning of sacrifice, as One who came “not to be served but to serve and to give His life a ransom for many.” All this because, as our gospel reading reminds us,” no one has greater love than this to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.”

Like many of the veteran’s that we honor on Veteran’s Day those who – if you asked would probably tell you that they would do it all again, that they would not hesitate to make the same sacrifice again.

We know that not only did Christ sacrifice Himself willingly He would also die for each one of us even if we were the only ones on earth in need of salvation.

On this day when we celebrate stewardship, the “hows” and “whys” of giving...on this day when we honor the sacrifice of others as people for whom Christ sacrificed Himself, I'd like to offer this story. It is the story of a man named George Thomas, a pastor in a small New England town. One Sunday morning when he arrived at the Church he was carrying a rusty, old bird cage – like this one. Many an eyebrow was raised. Then, as if in response, Pastor Thomas began to speak. “I was walking through town yesterday when I saw a young boy coming toward me swinging this bird cage. On the bottom of the cage were three little wild birds shivering with cold and fright. I stopped the lad and asked, ‘What do you have there, son?’ ‘Just some old birds’, came the reply. ‘What are you going to do with them?’ I asked. ‘Take ‘em home and have fun with ‘em,’ he answered. ‘I’m gonna tease ‘em and pull out their feathers to make ‘em fight. I’m gonna have a real good time.’ ‘But you’ll get tired of those birds sooner or later. What will you do then?’ ‘Oh, I got some cats,’ said the little boy. ‘They like birds. I’ll take ‘em to them’. The pastor was silent for a moment. ‘How much do you want for those birds, son?’ ‘Huh?!?!?! Why, you don't want those birds, mister. They’re just plain old field birds. They don’t sing. They ain’t even pretty!’ ‘How much’ the pastor asked again. The boy sized up the pastor as if he were crazy and said, ‘\$10?’ The pastor said, ‘DONE!’ He then reached into his pocket and took out a ten-dollar bill. He placed it in the boy's hand. In a flash, the boy was gone. The pastor picked up the cage and gently carried it to the end of the alley where there was a tree and a grassy spot. Setting the cage down, he opened the door and by softly tapping the bars persuaded the birds out, setting them free. Well, that explained the empty bird cage on the pulpit and then the pastor began to tell this story: One day Satan and Jesus were having a conversation. Satan had just come from the Garden of Eden and he was gloating and boasting. ‘Yes, sir, I just caught a world full of people down there. Set me a trap, used bait I knew they couldn’t resist. Got ‘em all!’ ‘What are you going to do with them?’ Jesus asked. Satan replied, ‘Oh, I’m gonna have fun! I’m gonna teach them how to marry and divorce each other, how to hate and abuse each other. I’m gonna teach them how to invent guns and bombs and wars and kill each other. I’m really gonna have fun!’ ‘And what will you do when you’re done with them?’ Jesus asked. ‘Oh, I’ll kill ‘em,’ Satan glared proudly. ‘How much do you want for them?’ Jesus asked. ‘Oh, You don't want those people. They ain’t no good. Why, You’ll take them, and they’ll just hate You. They’ll spit on You, curse You and kill You. You don’t want those people!!’ ‘How much?’ Jesus asked again. Satan looked at Jesus and sneered, ‘All Your blood, tears, pain – Your life!’ Jesus said, ‘DONE!’ Then He paid the price. He made the sacrifice.”

What can we **possibly** offer in response?

Thanks be to God.

Amen and amen.