

Seventh Weekend of Easter (RCL/A): Memorial Day Weekend: "That They May All Be One"  
Psalm 68:1-10; 32-35; 1 Peter 4:12-14; 5:6-11; John 17:1-11  
May 23-24, 2020  
Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Manasquan, NJ

"Pastor Mary, please say a prayer." I'm asked that pretty frequently. It's natural to want others to chime in and multiply our prayer power (Jesus does say, "two or more" gathered in His name). But we also have what's probably a misconception that some people's prayers count more than others. Maybe a part of me believes that, too. I'm always happy and relieved when people tell me they're praying for me and my loved ones. And there are certain prayer warriors among us who have been so steeped in prayer for such a long lifetime that I could believe **their** connection **is** a bit stronger than **mine**.

In two weeks, on June 6, we mark the 76<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the D-Day invasion, Operation Overlord. German radio reported it first. Then AP got hold of the breaking news, after which it hit the New York papers and was announced over U.S. radio. General Eisenhower was serving as Supreme Allied Commander. His order of the day, given to the multinational force about to cross the English Channel to Normandy, was aired repeatedly in the U.S.:

Soldiers, Sailors and Airmen of the Allied Expeditionary Force:

You are about to embark upon the Great Crusade, toward which we have striven these many months. The eyes of the world are upon you. The hope and prayers of liberty-loving people everywhere march with you....

Your task will not be an easy one. Your enemy is well trained, well equipped and battle-hardened. He will fight savagely.

But this is the year 1944! ... The tide has turned! The free men of the world are marching together to Victory!

I have full confidence in your courage, devotion to duty and skill in battle. We will accept nothing less than full victory!

Good luck! And let us beseech the blessing of Almighty God upon this great and noble undertaking."<sup>1</sup>

War is hell, but because of that true desire to liberate the oppressed, to end tyranny, to stop genocide, to dethrone madmen, World War II has been called “the Good War.” FDR prayed with our nation live over the radio, a prayer that was also printed in the papers:

Almighty God: Our sons, pride of our nation, this day have set upon a mighty endeavor....

Lead them straight and true; give strength to their arms, stoutness to their hearts, steadfastness in their faith....

These men are lately drawn from the ways of peace. They fight not for the lust of conquest. They fight to end conquest. They fight to liberate.... They yearn but for the end of battle, for their return to the haven of home.

Some will never return. Embrace these, Father, and receive them, Thy heroic servants, into Thy kingdom....

And, O Lord, give us faith. Give us faith in Thee; faith in our sons; faith in each other.... Thy will be done, Almighty God. Amen<sup>2</sup>

On June 6, 1944, the *New York Daily News* printed the Lord's Prayer instead of lead articles on the front page. Broadway closed. Lord & Taylor's president told its 3,000 employees to stay home and pray.... Church bells rang across the land, a solemn call to prayer. Churches and synagogues were packed. Such unity in faith, across political and religious and geographic divides!

There was unity among the Allied nations as well, obviously. It wasn't just Americans who hit the beachheads of Normandy. There were primarily Americans, Brits, and Canadians, but also present were Australians, Belgians, Czechoslovakians, Danes, Free French, Greeks, Dutch, Kiwis (New Zealanders), Norwegians and Poles.

That diverse Allied Expeditionary Force was one, and as a result won costly victory. In this weekend's Gospel, Jesus prays that **His followers** all be one. Talk about the One you want praying for you!! I'll pick Jesus every time! A couple weeks ago we heard Jesus telling us to pray for anything in His name and it would be granted. Well, if anyone can pray in Jesus' name, it's Jesus! With **Jesus** praying, how can the Father not respond??

**Jesus'** will and the **Father's** will are one, so the Son's prayer for our unity is sure to be answered in the affirmative by the Father!

Now, we might say, "Unity is a tall order!" We have so many opinions about so many things. Neither our big faith family of the Body of Christ or our smaller faith family of the ELCA or our little faith family of Holy Trinity is immune to the issues, the disagreements, that divide our nation and world. True. But do not doubt: our Lord **was then** and **is now** praying for **us** and **not just** for those first disciples. In this Gospel, the story of what He said the night before He died on the cross, it's like Jesus is speaking and praying from some timeless place in which His crucifixion, resurrection and ascension have already happened. He intercedes for us as our "great high priest," as He's referred to in the Letter to the Hebrews.

Part of our Lord Jesus' farewell message is passing the baton of ministry to those who love and follow Him. "I'm going; you're staying; tag, you're it!"

*"I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13:34-35)*

Whatever differences exist among us, we must be **united** in love of God and neighbor. This is our most powerful witness to the world. It is a love which can't make distinctions because of whom someone votes for or sleeps with, because of where someone was born or what language they speak, because of what color their skin is or whether they are Christian or not. The world is full of pain. We are called to alleviate that suffering; we are tasked with preventing it as well. The world is full of hate and we are called to counteract that hatred with love. The true sign that we are sheep who recognize the Shepherd's voice, that our community **is** one in which the Son and the Father are glorified, is that we live in love.

“...[N]o greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.” (John 15:13)

On Memorial Day weekend, we’re especially mindful of those who have laid down their lives on the battlefield, in the air, on the sea. We give God thanks for the gift of them, their courage, their selflessness, their own and their family’s sacrifice. We ask that our nation be one, but most of all we echo our Lord’s prayer that we, His followers, be one, for the sake of our witness to the world, for the sake of God’s children of all faiths and of none. Our ecumenical ministries like the Food Pantry, the Furniture Bank, Family Promise, I-RISE, our ecumenical worship, like the pre-Pentecost devotions posted daily on the Ministerium’s Facebook page, our ecumenical studies, like the upcoming Lutheran/Roman Catholic discussion of *The Lord Is My Shepherd: Healing Wisdom from the Twenty-Third Psalm*, all of these proclaim our unity in Christ and are a fulfillment of our High Priest’s prayer that we all be one.

When we falter in shared faith, when we become afraid of criticism for advocating for the most vulnerable among us, let’s remember the good counsel in today’s lesson from 1 Peter (3:7): “Cast all your anxiety on [God], because he cares for you.” And let us hold close to our hearts the image of our Savior interceding for us in all things, in wartime and in peace, in the midst of pandemic and in less stressful seasons, as we worship in our homes as surely as when we have worshiped together in our sanctuary. Let’s remember to pray for each other as well. Each of us belongs to the priesthood of all the faithful; every one of us is more powerful in prayer than we realize. Amen

<sup>1</sup>Stephen Ambrose, *D-Day: The Climactic Battle of World War II* (NY: Simon & Schuster, 1994), p. 171.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid, p. 491.

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