Memorial Day 2016 - Willingness

5/28/16

2 Corinthians 11-12: *Now finish the work, so that your eager willingness to do it may be matched by your completion of it, according to your means. For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what one does not have*.

Tomorrow is Memorial Day; the time we honor those American service members who died in combat. It began in Columbus, Georgia on April 26, 1866 to formally recognize those who died in the Civil War. Historians, will site that Columbus, Mississippi celebrated it a day earlier, only because newspaper editors misprinted the intended date. Some people hold that Waterloo, New York was the first, but historians have dismissed those claims because of yet another misprint by a reporter. The date Waterloo celebrated Memorial Day was actually May 5, 1868.

One Yale professor, David Blight, says that the first Memorial Day was on May 1, 1865, when workmen honored and buried dead soldiers from the Union Army at a racetrack that had been turned into a war prison. But this commemoration did not spark a national holiday, so the women of Columbus, Georgia, claim the distinction of being the first to celebrate what has come to be called Memorial Day.

The holiday was often referred to as Decoration Day because residents decorated the graves of the fallen soldiers. In May of 1868 Memorial Day became official. But because there were so few wild flowers available in April in the North to sustain the tradition of decorating the soldier’s graves, the holiday was moved to May 30th. In 1971 it was established to be the last Monday in May. Some Southerners still celebrate Memorial Day on April 26 because they believe that the Northerners stole their idea. I suppose we still have a ways to go before we can ‘just get along’.

Since its inception, Memorial Day has developed into a time when we honor all civil servants who have died in service to this country, whether in the military, the Police, Firefighters, and other civic duties.

On a personal level, Memorial Day also extends to those we have lost in our life: family, friends, people who have mattered to us.

As I think about Memorial Day, one of the qualities that come to my mind is that of Willingness. In the context of our traditional Memorial Day celebration, the soldiers who gave their lives did not want to die; but they were willing to give their lives for their country and an idea that they believed in. They may not have wanted to serve at all, but they were willing to serve when they were called.

Our willingness can be in opposition to our wants, and at other times our willingness supports our wants and desires. We may want something so much that we are willing to do what is necessary to attain that desire.

I promised Jonathan that I would sing a song that the English hold dear. It is entitled *Jerusalem*. It may become their National Anthem, which is different from *God Save the Queen,* which is the National Anthem for all of the United Kingdom. The lyrics for *Jerusalem* were written by William Blake, who was a spiritual mystic and made a living as an engraver. He wrote this poem in 1805, at a time when the industrial revolution was bringing changes to the world. In England, mills were springing up. Although they brought progress, to Blake’s mind these changes also brought destruction to the landscape and natural resources, as well as a repressive enslavement of the people who worked there. The music was composed by Sir Hubert Parry in 1916.

[Sing the song: Jerusalem.]

That song is beloved by the English. I think partly because of the wonderful melody, but also the brilliant lyrics of Blake. What the song illustrates to me is the willingness that we demonstrate to build Jerusalem, or the place of peace, within our country or ourselves. We are willing to pick up the bow and the sword, not only physically, but metaphysically, in order to find peace. We will utilize the sword of Truth and the bow of discerning focus, and employ the divine energy of the Chariot of Fire in order to reach our end desire.

The soldiers and civil protectors that we honor on Memorial Day gain our praise and gratitude because of their willingness to give their all for a cause that had captured their hearts.

The willingness to move past our personal desires and wants is what separates the spiritually mature soul from the developing, but as of yet, still unawakened heart. Our gratitude and admiration are extended to those who are willing to help, willing to serve, and willing to go above and beyond what is expected.

We are blessed by the willingness of others to share their gifts although they may feel disinclined. They may feel unready, unprepared, but yet they are willing to give what they can. As our Bible verse says, if we are willing, our gift is accepted in accordance to what we can give at this moment, not just what we could give under ideal circumstances.

Sometimes we are reluctant and unwilling to answer God’s call because we don’t feel well, or are running on low energy, or we are afraid. We may want to wait; we may wish to delay because we could bring more into play on another day. What we fail to take into consideration is that the Christ flowing through us will use our willing efforts optimally. Today, at this moment, what we are willing to unabashedly and non-judgmentally share is sufficient.

Proverbs 3:5-6 teaches this: *Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths*.

Our willingness to trust God is what allows God’s power, love, peace, and joy to flow through us.

Let us pray….