

Veterans Day
November 11, 2009
St. Margaret's Church
Annapolis

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer.
Amen.

Veterans Day, as you may know, was originally known as Armistice Day. It was inspired by President Woodrow Wilson, who declared November 11, 1919, a day of remembrance for the armistice that ended what we now refer to as World War I at the eleventh hour, the eleventh day of the eleventh month in 1918. And we all remember what that war was originally called: The War to End All Wars.

How we might wish that had been so.

Since then, the world has endured the Second World War, the so-called Korean Conflict, the military action in Vietnam, Desert Storm, the current wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and countless smaller conflicts around the world. And there is not end in sight.

This is a terrible dilemma for us as Christians. How many times and how many ways does Jesus call for us to love one another? How many times and how many ways does God in Christ call us to live in peace, to forgive as we have been forgiven, to pray for those who persecute us, and love our enemies?

And yet, it is not so.

I have often wondered what the world would be like today if, after 9/11, we had announced our forgiveness of those who had attacked us; if we had memorialized the innocent victims of that horrific day by sending food and medicine around the world to those most in need of such things.

But then, I admit: I am naïve; I am sheltered; that it is easy to be radical about peace and love in the abstract when I live in relative ease and safety.

It's not that I am without military credentials of a sort. My father served in the Navy in WWII and during the Korean Conflict. He died, in fact, of a so-called war-connected illness. My first husband and father of my children served in the Navy in Vietnam. My Bill served in the Army in Korea, and he lost a brother in Vietnam. And my daughter and son-in-law are members of the U.S. Navy Band.

I am a product of this country. My throat catches when I see the flag flying and hear the National Anthem. I've come to this area so recently, that I'm still thrilled when I drive by the various historic monuments... from the War Memorial near the Academy Bridge to the sight of the Washington Monument when approaching D.C.

So in spite of my naiveté and theological idealism, I find myself profoundly and deeply grateful for those who have protected our freedoms – personal, political, and religious – by wearing the uniform of the Navy, Marines, Coast Guard, Army, Air Force, and National Guard. By serving in places far and near. By doing the hard things necessary in the realities of this sinful and broken world that safeguard the rest of us. By asking their families to make sacrifices that make their work possible.

And sometimes, God help us, by giving their very lives for the hope of freedom for all people.

So, were it proper for me to salute, I would do so. May it suffice that I offer my humble and sincere gratitude to all who have served and all who currently serve in the armed forces. May God bless and protect them and you, and may all that they and you have done and are now doing be in the ultimate service of peace.

Amen.

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