

Anniversary and Memorial Sunday

A Sunday School teacher challenged her children to take some time on that afternoon to write a letter to God. They were to bring their letter back the following Sunday. One little boy wrote, "Dear God. We had a good time at church today. Wish you could have been there."

Beside us in our Remembering

When the Civil War ended a day of remembrance was set aside as a national holiday. Since 9-11 this has grown into a time of remembering not only military service people but those who were injured in war, and rescuers who step into chaos and were injured or lost lives, especially firemen and police. Today we also remember those we have lost in our own lives. It takes courage to attend memorial day services. We don't like to let our grief show, especially not in such public settings. I remember the first parade I attended after my father died. When a Marine color guard marched by it was all I could do to keep it together. I just wanted to hide.

We humans have been blessed – or some say cursed – with memory. We remember our loved ones and the loss pains us. Yet when we are together with friends and family, don't we always find ourselves telling the stories over again? Some that make us laugh out loud, some that make us wistful. We look around at the children and see family traits coming out. We look around and realize we are neither alone in our loss nor in our remembering.

That's what church is about, you know. Coming together, not only in worship or celebration but in tough times – especially in tough times. With the help of scripture, we as the church have long memories – memories that can place us in that Upper Room right alongside the disciples when Jesus speaks these powerful words: “¹⁵If you love me, you will keep my commandments. ¹⁶And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever.”

Jesus is telling us no matter what comes to “keep the faith.” Make a choice for faith. Remember what I have done and what I have taught, for you have to carry on. But you don't have to do it alone. God will send another in my place – you'll call it the Holy Spirit.

A little teaching moment - ‘... the word employed by John in this passage -- paracletos -- and often translated “Advocate” can have several overlapping meanings. It can function in a legal sense, meaning literally one who advocates for you before a court of law. And it can function more relationally by designating one who brings help, consolation, comfort, and encouragement. All of these however, derive from the most basic meaning of the word to “come along side another.”’ (Lose)

Jesus' presence is beside us at all times. We are called to do the same for one another. Speaking of remembrances, I think we all remember where we were on September 11th when the news broke. I was serving a church in Fairfield County and a huge number of our community worked in and around New York City. In the church office that day it was surreal. When the reality dawned on us, the first thing we did was to go and open the doors to the sanctuary which faced out to a very busy intersection. We wanted people to know that no matter what, they were welcome to come, sit, talk, pray. Some did. But I heard a number of times

later from people driving by that just seeing those doors open was comforting in itself. They didn't feel alone in the chaos.

I had another sermon topic originally chosen for today. But as I really paid attention to the amount of memorials occurring – for Memorial Day and for loved ones who have recently died – I adapted. Because remembering is important.

In your bulletin is a piece of paper that you are invited to write the names of those you would like remembered. If you place them in the offering plate we will include them in our prayers today.

Not only is this Memorial Day weekend, it is also a time we celebrate the anniversary of the church. We remember those who grew this church and especially those ministers who served so faithfully. We also remember loved ones lost. We remember companion animals who are now gone. We think of those whose illnesses have changed them – alzheimer's disease, mental illness, and more.

We remember especially those who have lost their lives serving this country – military, fire, police, and ordinary people who stepped in because there was a need.

And through it all, we have this Advocate, the Spirit of Christ, that walks beside us always. May we embody that same spirit as the church, called to be partners on this journey of life and faith.

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