

## Remembering to Remember

Memorial Day and Easter 6, Year A – John 14:15-21

*preached by the Rector at St. Paul's, Henderson, May 25, 2014*

Lord, take my eyes and see through them. Take my lips and speak through them. Take my soul and set it on fire with love for thee. Amen.

Alleluia, Christ is risen! The Lord is risen indeed! Alleluia!

In addition to an extra day to get away with family and friends – the busiest travel weekend of the year, I have heard, and I *see* – this weekend is a chance for us to deliberately remember to remember. I suppose that this weekend as we remember to remember, I *could* talk about all the men and women throughout the history of our nation, the famous *and* the unknown, who have given their lives so that we could live *our* lives of freedom and peace – and those that still do. I suppose that this weekend as we remember to remember, I *could* talk about all the saintly people throughout the history of the Church who have given *their* lives for the spread of the Gospel, all the learned theologians, all the pious bishops, all the glorious martyrs. But this week, as I approached this weekend of remembrance, perhaps like you, my own thoughts have been considerably closer to home.

I remember a man who served two tours as an infantryman in Vietnam, whose eyes misted over when he spoke the names of friends gone in those foreign jungles, when he spoke of the silence and the chaos and the incredible *madness* of war. I remember the night in Puerto Rico when he taught me a lesson in compassion and caring through his own near death. I remember the lessons he taught me about surviving horrible circumstances. I remember a night of fear and danger, when he taught me the *ultimate* lesson in survival as he helped me sing stupid show tunes at the top of my lungs in the middle of the Saudi Arabian desert. I remember how he taught me over and over again the truth of the saying that soldiers do not fight for the love of their country – they fight for the love of their friends. Sergeant First Class Karle S. Smith is still living, having retired from the Army about the time I entered seminary. But his youth he poured out in defense of the freedom we all enjoy. This weekend as I remember to remember, I remember my friend, Smitty who gave his life – and still gives it – in the service of his country and his friends.

I remember a man who spent *his* youth in seminary instead of Vietnam, who fought racism in the Deep South instead of communism in the deep jungle, who counted as his one rejection the fact that by the time he wanted to join the armed forces, he was too old for them to want *him*. I remember the morning he taught me how to use incense, and the evening he taught me that being a priest is a whole lot more than a well-crafted sermon or a refined style at the altar. I remember the day we first celebrated the Holy Eucharist together, and the night we sat and prayed together as a friend took her last breath. I remember the many, many times he reminded me that though “Salvation is deadly earnest bid’ness,” the rest of being a Christian is meant to be a joy, and that in all our concern about what was precise and pious and proper, usually, “God don’t care.” One morning, minutes after saying Morning Prayer, and days before he was eligible to retire from active ordained ministry, the Rev. Canon Nathaniel Wilson Massey, Jr. fell to the floor of the Parish Office of Saint John’s Episcopal Church in Decatur, Alabama, and was buried two weeks before I left Alabama to become a cathedral dean half a continent away. This weekend as I remember to remember, I remember my mentor, Nat who gave his life in the service of Christ and his Church.

I remember a woman who spent decades bringing up her family of nine children. Some of her sons served in one war, some of her grandchildren served in others. I remember the stories of how she scrimped and scraped and saved so that her family would have enough during the rigors and rationing of the World War, and I remember the family reunions when my little-boy belly nearly burst from the abundance. My first memory of her is of her sheer determination – in the

fire of her eyes and the set of her mouth. My last memory of her is of her inability to remember *me*, but the look of pride in her eyes when she looked at her great-grandsons. When we laid her to rest from the little white country church in the middle of Ohio farm country, I remember we used Psalm 128, a celebration of the blessing of living to see your children's children – and maybe even *their* children. Joy Wise Furlong lived a long, long life, filled with overwhelming sorrows and bitter disappointments as well as inexpressible joy, a long, long life filled... with love. This weekend as I remember to remember, I remember Grandma Furlong who gave her life in gentle, humble service to her family and to her God.

I remember a man who was too young for the Second World War, had a college deferment for the Korean conflict, and who, by the time the U.S. got involved in Vietnam, had so many kids, they didn't even give him a number. I remember the day he taught me to ride a bicycle, and the day he taught me to drive a car. I remember the morning he taught me how to shave, and the afternoon he taught me that being a man had nothing to do with facial hair. I remember the lessons he taught me about painting – pictures *and* houses. I remember the lesson he taught me about auto repair. And I remember the many, many lessons he taught me about love and family. The doctors had told him after his first heart attack that he needed to back off from teaching, but he was unwilling to give the children he taught anything less than his fullest, each and every minute. The morning he died, he was playing basketball with a bunch of the middle-schoolers he loved. Donald Eugene Martindale never fought in the armed forces, but by gifts of time and patience and love, he built the lives of *hundreds* of kids, including this one. Last week, my family said good-bye to my mother's husband, the man who led our family to three new generations. But this weekend as I remember to remember, I remember my dad who never saw his children's children, but who gave his whole life in love for *his* family, and countless others.

I remember the stories of a man who taught that there is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends. I remember a man who associated with the least desirable and furthest outcast, who apparently didn't much care whether he was "the right fit," and who preached that no rule or principle or commandment is more important than that we love one another. I remember a man who suffered and bled and died for my sins and for yours, a man who, though he knew no sin, became the offering, the *sacrifice* for the sin of the whole world. I remember a God who wanted so badly to redeem the human race that he himself became one of us to prove his love beyond the faintest shadow of a doubt. And I remember that that God-man, man-God taught, no, he *commanded* that those who follow him should love one another as he loved them. That *we* should love one another as he loved us. As he loved *us*!

I suspect that you remember some men or women like my friend Smitty who have given their life in the service of our country. I suspect that you remember some men or women like my dad who have given their best even when it cost the most. I suspect you remember some men or women like Nat Massey and Joy Furlong who have devoted their lives to loving in obedience to our Lord's command. I hope that you remember the one who loved you while you still had your back turned on him. I hope that you remember the one who loved you enough to give absolutely *everything*. And more than anything, I hope with all my heart that you not only remember him, but that you know him, really *know* him, today and every day.

This weekend as we remember to remember, let us remember the cost of our freedom, let us remember the cost of our peace and our prosperity, and let us remember the cost of our salvation. Let us remember to praise the God who has given us all these things, and remember to thank those dear to us, who have cultivated them in our hearts.

Alleluia, Christ is risen! The Lord is risen indeed! Alleluia!