

**Remember Me**

The Church of the Covenant, Washington, PA

John 15:9-15

Memorial Day, May 28, 2017

*“My command is this: love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.”*

Every year when Memorial Day comes around, this Bible verse comes to mind: *“Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.”* I suppose that I remember that verse because that really is what Memorial Day is all about – to honor, to remember, to never forget those who made that ultimate sacrifice – to lay down their lives while protecting and defending their friends, their comrades-at-arms, their country, their families, their homes, their values, their freedom of religion.

We all know stories of men and women who made the ultimate sacrifice, laying down their lives for others during WWII, Viet Nam, Desert Storm, Iraq, and others.

**I. Thomas Allebach Shipe**

Don Nixon told me the other day about a young man who graduated from Peters Township High School nearly 50 years ago. Thomas Allebach Shipe enlisted in the Army in 1969. A little over a year later, he and his unit were searching for a Viet Cong Prisoner of War camp when they discovered enemy soldiers in a cave. Private Shipe volunteered to be one of two men to enter and search the cave. He came under heavy fire at close range and began to return fire to enable his comrade to reach the cave entrance and signal for help. He sacrificed his own life in an attempt to accomplish the mission.

“Just before he left to go to Vietnam, he wrote his parents a letter saying he had found God. In Vietnam, Tom was given the nickname ‘Rev,’ short for Reverend. He would conduct religious services for the soldiers in the field when a chaplain was not available. Tom had found a place for God in his heart during the war. The letters he sent home said he planned to enter the Episcopal Ministry after completing his military service. He was a member of St. David’s Episcopal Church in Peters Township.”<sup>1</sup> As a result of his letters and testimony, all of his family members became Christians too.

Thomas Allebach Shipe loved others the way that Jesus Christ loved him: *“My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this: That he lay down his life for his friends.”*

**II. Father Maximilian Kolbe**

Not all who gave their lives in the war died on the battle field. Father Maximilian Kolbe, a Polish Priest, was head of a monastery in Poland. When the Nazis invaded Poland, Father Kolbe sent most of the friars home. For quite awhile, he gave shelter to refugees. Eventually the word got out, and he and four companions were arrested and taken to Auschwitz for sheltering 3,000 Polish refugees, 2,000 of whom were Jews, in their friary. Even in the prison camp Father Kolbe cared for everyone else, prayed for his tormentors, and shared his meager food.

Whenever a prisoner escaped, the Nazis punished those who remained. Ten prisoners were sent to the starvation bunker, to deter others from trying to escape. One of those ten cried out in anguish: “My poor wife! My poor children! What will they do?” Father Kolbe told the Nazi commandant, “I am a Catholic priest. I am old. He has a wife and children. Let me take his place.”

To the astonishment of all observers, the commandant agreed. Father Kolbe accompanied the nine other men into the starvation bunker, where he encouraged the dying men with prayers, psalms, and meditations on the Passion of Christ. After two weeks, six had starved to death. The Nazis wanted the space for more prisoners, so they injected the remaining four with carbolic acid. Father Kolbe was the last to go.

A survivor of Auschwitz said that Father Kolbe's life and death was "A shock filled with hope, bringing new life and strength. It was like a powerful shaft of light in the darkness of the camp." And the man whom Father Kolbe saved? Francis Gajowniczek lived to be 95. Every year for 50 years he went back to Auschwitz to honor and pay homage to Father Kolbe, who died on his behalf.<sup>ii</sup>

Father Maximilian Kolbe loved others as Jesus loved him. He lived out Jesus' command: "Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends."

### **III. Dr. Boris Kornfeld**

Dr. Boris Kornfeld was a Jewish doctor who was arrested and dumped in the Gulag concentration camp, where he was forced to give medical care to both guards and prisoners. Through the influence of another prisoner, Dr. Kornfeld eventually gave his life to Christ.

On one occasion, he was working on a prisoner who had cancer of the intestines, and appeared to be near death. The doctor was so concerned for the man's eternal destiny that he talked to him all night long about Christ. The next day when the patient awoke, he learned that his surgeon, Dr. Kornfeld, had been brutally murdered for what he had done. Sometime later the patient realized what it meant for Dr. Kornfeld to have given his life for what he believed, and the patient himself became a Christian. He went on to become a great theologian and author, impacting lives around the world for Christ. His name? Alexander Solzhenitsyn.<sup>iii</sup>

Dr. Kornfeld lived Christ's command, and laid down his life for his friends.

### **IV. Corporal Jacob DeShazer**

On April 18, 1942, Army Corporal Jacob DeShazer boarded a bomber plane with his pilot, co-pilot, navigator and rear gunner. Their mission was a success, but the plane ran out of fuel, and they were forced to jump from the plane. DeShazer was taken prisoner by the Japanese. Eventually their captors increased their rations, and even allowed the prisoners to have reading material, including the Bible. DeShazer waited 6 months for his turn with the Bible, and read it over and over again. The day he had to give up the Bible he read again Romans 10:9 "If you confess with your mouth that 'Jesus is Lord', and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."

DeShazer confessed his belief in Christ, begged for forgiveness, and became a Christian. The article I read gave many examples of how his attitudes toward his captors and his behavior were slowly changed by his new faith in Christ. After the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, DeShazer and the other prisoners were freed.

In 1948 Jacob DeShazer and his wife returned to Japan as missionaries, helping Japanese Christians to establish churches. Although the church planting was going well, early in 1950 DeShazer longed for revival in Japan. He fasted and prayed 40 days for the salvation of the Japanese. A few days after he ended his fast, a man came to his home and introduced himself - Mitsuo Fuchida, flight commander of the 360 planes that attacked Pearl Harbor. After reading DeShazer's testimony in the tract "I was a Prisoner of the Japanese," he had purchased a New Testament, read it, and had accepted Christ. DeShazer welcomed him as a brother and counseled him to be baptized. Within a short time Fuchida became an evangelist, and preached in Japan and all over the world. Because of one shared Bible, the man who first came to bomb Japan...returned on the wings of a dove to spread the "peace that passeth understanding" in that country for the next thirty years.<sup>iv</sup>

Although Jacob DeShazer did not die in WWII, still, he gave his entire life sacrificially, so that the Japanese would receive new life in Christ.

*Greater love has no one than this: that one gives up one's life for one's friends.*

## **V. Jesus Christ**

The scripture that we are focusing on this morning, John 15:9-15, is part of a very long section of the Gospel of John that records all that happened the night before Jesus was crucified.

Jesus and his disciples were gathered in the Upper Room in preparation for the Passover Feast. The apostle John reported: *"Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; therefore, he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and ... began to wash his disciples' feet."*<sup>v</sup> When he had finished, Jesus told his disciples, *"I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you."*

As the evening progressed, Jesus said, *"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."*<sup>vi</sup> Jesus repeated, *"If you love me, you will obey what I command."*<sup>vii</sup>

Jesus promised that after he had died, the Holy Spirit would come to be their teacher, counselor, comforter and guide. He explained that he, Jesus, was the vine and they, his disciples, were the branches. Jesus said, *"Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."*<sup>viii</sup>

The very next thing Jesus says is the passage that is our text this morning. *"As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete...."*

*"My command is this; Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead I have called you friends, for everything I have learned from my Father I have made known to you."*<sup>ix</sup>

Jesus goes on. He told his disciples, who were his closest friends, that he was going to be killed. He explained that he would not leave them alone, but would send the Holy Spirit to help them. He promised that their grief would be turned into joy once they realized what Jesus had accomplished.

His final words of prayer for all who believe in Him were these: *"I have made you, Father, known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them, and that I myself may be in them."*<sup>x</sup>

True to his word, 40 days after His resurrection, Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to his followers, who went out into the world to preach and teach and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey all that Jesus commanded.

This weekend we remember all those who laid down their lives so that others would live in safety. It is hard to imagine that any of us will be faced with such dramatic sacrifices as those made by Father Kolbe, Thomas Shipe, Dr. Kornfeld, Corporal DeShazer, or any of your friends and relatives who died in the service of their country.

On the other hand, God is calling us to lay down our lives, our preferences, our time, our own desires, in order to serve and care for those in need in Washington County, in Haiti, in West Virginia, perhaps even in our own neighborhood and place of employment. But how can we do that? The Bible says that all those who believe in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, who works within each believer to make them more like Christ.

Be encouraged by the promise Jesus gives: It is the life-giving Holy Spirit who will enable you to love and serve others the way that Jesus loves you, and to be able to “lay down your life for your friends.” Amen.

---

### Litany of Response

from *The Book of Worship for United States Forces* (1974)

(One-time permission to print and use this litany in congregational worship has been granted by The Armed Forces Chaplains' Board, Washington, D.C.)

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/memorial-day-worship-and-prayer-resources1>

Leader: Let us give thanks to God for the land of our birth with all its chartered liberties. For all the wonder of our country's story:

**PEOPLE: WE GIVE YOU THANKS, O GOD.**

Leader: For leaders in nation and state, and for those who in days past and in these present times have labored for the commonwealth:

**PEOPLE: WE GIVE YOU THANKS, O GOD.**

Leader: For those who in all times and places have been true and brave, and in the worlds common ways have lived upright lives and ministered to their fellows:

**PEOPLE: WE GIVE YOU THANKS, O GOD.**

Leader: For those who served their country in its hour of need, and especially for those who gave even their lives in that service:

**PEOPLE: WE GIVE YOU THANKS, O GOD.**

Leader: Almighty God and most merciful Father, as we remember these, your servants, remembering with gratitude their courage and strength, we hold before you those who mourn them. Look upon your bereaved servants with your mercy. As this day brings them memories of those they have lost awhile, may it also bring your consolation and the assurance that their loved ones are alive now and forever in your living presence. Amen.

### BENEDICTION *Traditional Celtic Prayer*

May the Christ who **walks** on wounded feet walk with you on the road.

May the Christ who **serves** with wounded hands, Stretch out your hands to serve.

May the Christ who **loves** with wounded heart open your heart to love.

And may you see the face of Christ in everyone you meet,

And may everyone you meet see the face of Christ in you.

In the Name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

---

<sup>i</sup> [www.donnan.com/shipe.htm](http://www.donnan.com/shipe.htm)

<sup>ii</sup> <http://auschwitz.dk/kolbe.htm>

<sup>iii</sup> P. 619-620 in *The Tardy Oxcart and other Stories*, compiled by Chuck Swindoll. This story was told by Charles Colson in his book, *Loving God*.

<sup>iv</sup> <http://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2009/may/7051809.html?start=1>

<sup>v</sup> John 13:3-5

<sup>vi</sup> John 13:34-35

<sup>vii</sup> John 14:15

---

viii John 15:1-8  
ix John 15:9-15  
x John 17:26