

July 5, 2015

Service Leader: James Gibbons Walker
Worship Associate: Susan Swope

Welcome and Announcements

Prelude

Opening Words & Lighting of the Chalice: #429 Come into this place of peace

Come into this place of peace
And let its silence heal your spirit;
Come into this place of memory
And its history warm your soul;
Come into this place of prophecy and power
And let its vision change your heart.

Opening Hymn: #244 It Came upon the Midnight Clear

A Time for All Ages "Someday: Frances Ellen Watkins Harper" from
A Lamp in Every Corner – Janeen K. Grohsmeyer

Sharing of Joys & Sorrows

If you woke up this morning with a joy you could not wait to come to church to share or have a sorrow that is weighing on your heart, now is the time to share. Please come forward and place a stone or other object provided into the water as you speak, or the Worship Assistant can place one for you.

Unison Affirmation

May the light of this flame and the weight of our words
inspire us to use our powers to heal and not to harm,
to help and not to hinder,
to serve the spirit of life in loving affection and trusting hope.

Meditation & Silence from *John Brown's Body* – Stephen Vincent Benét

You took a carriage to that battlefield
Now, I suppose, you take a motor-bus
But, then, it was a carriage and you ate
Fried chicken out of wrappings and waxed paper,
While the slow guide buzzed on about the war
And the enormous, curdled summer clouds
Piled up like giant cream puffs in the blue.
The carriage smelt of axle-grease and leather
And the old horse nodded a sleepy head
Adorned with a straw hat. His ears stuck through it.
It was the middle of hay-fever summer
And it was hot. And you could stand and look
All the way down from Cemetery Ridge,
Much as it was, except for the monuments
And startling groups of monumental men
Bursting in bronze and marble from the ground,
And all the curious names and gravestones.
So peaceable it was, so calm and hot,
So tidy and great-skied.

No men had fought
There but enormous monumental men
Who bled neat streams of uncorrupting bronze,
Even at the Round Tops, even by Pickett's boulder
Where the bronze, open book could still be read
By the visitors and sparrows and the wind:
And the wind came, the wind moved the grass,
Saying...while the long light... and all so calm...

*"Pickett came
And the South came
And the end comes,
And the grass comes
And the wind blows
On the bronze book
On the bronze men
On the grown grass,
And the wind says
'Long ago
Long
Ago'"*

Then it was time to buy a paperweight
With flags upon it in decalcomania
And hope you wouldn't break it driving home.

Meditation Hymn: #83 Winds Be Still

Reading: Isaiah 2:4

In the days to come

God shall judge between the nations,
and shall arbitrate for many peoples;
they shall beat their swords into plowshares,
and their spears into pruning hooks;
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
neither shall they learn war any more.

**Sermon: Monumental Men Who Bled Neat Streams of Uncorrupting Bronze:
The War All Around Us**

First I must thank Susan Swope for helping me to feel comfortable this morning. I must also thank Rev. Kerry Mueller and Rev. Dave Hunter, your ministers, for suggesting me to your worship committee as a visiting preacher.

And thanks to all of you.

A worship service is just part of a larger celebration. A sermon is just part of a larger conversation.

The conversation starts with what we bring this morning from our own lives, it continues through a message that tries to make some sense of our shared situation, and then continues further, as we agree or disagree, as we continue to recall, discuss, reshape, and make our own what we have heard, so we can carry it on and live it out in the larger celebration that is our life.

To paraphrase your order of service, it is then when our service truly begins.

Let me frame today's conversation by outlining briefly what I would like us to reflect on today.

Many years ago, Ralph Waldo Emerson said the job of the minister is to "deal out to the people his life – life passed through the fire of thought."

For me, these summer celebrations, Memorial Day, the 4th. Of July, the anniversary of the Gettysburg battle, are bittersweet; they bring up many memories and feelings and thoughts.

That is what I plan to share with you today.

It is my hope that those who wish can continue this conversation with me in the coffee hour.

Last month we celebrated Memorial Day, this past week there were observances of the 152nd anniversary of the Battle of Gettysburg, yesterday was Independence Day.

These long weekends have become a time of sales of all kinds “the big Memorial Day blowout,” or “4th. Of July Frenzy.” When I was younger, these long weekends were all about that first trips to the beach, planning how this summer time was going to be different, better, delays on the Bay Bridge, and as I got within a mile or so of Ocean City, in the car with my friends, the smell of salt air and thousands of bodies, baking in Coppertone.

It didn't start out that way.

A hundred or more years ago, Memorial Day was Decoration Day, the 4th. of July was Independence Day, solemn days for remembering.

Remembering heroic deeds done by people of flesh and blood and bone.

Remembering times of national struggle.

Remembering the women and men who died while serving in the United States Armed Forces and those who devoted their lives to shape and build and preserve our country.

Let me share with you some reflections on the 1861 – 1865 war, called variously, depending on what part of our country you are in, the War of Northern Aggression, the War of the Rebellion, the War Between the States, the Civil War. I think these reflections are relevant not only on that war, but on all wars. I think these reflections can apply to heroism, to theodicy (I'll tell you what that is in a little while) and to the reasons for and the results of wars.

Decoration Day was a response to great loss. More than 650,000 Americans died in the Civil War. Let me put this figure into perspective for you. We have all seen, either in person or in pictures, the Viet Nam Memorial, the Wall. On Memorial Day, President Obama and other notables placed wreaths and made speeches at the Wall to honor those who died in that war. There are 58, 286 names on the Wall. It would take more than eleven Walls to list the Confederate and Union dead. In the three days of the battle of Gettysburg alone, almost as many soldiers were killed, wounded or were missing in action, about 51,000, as there are names on the Wall.

Each one was and is a precious life, cut short before its time.

In all wars, there are those who go and those who stay behind.

I did not fight in Viet Nam, the war of my generation. I have a bad back. I was 4-F, unfit for service. At the time, I felt that I was lucky. I could go to Ocean City with my friends. That is part of summer, for me, a remembering of how lucky I am. A remembering that there were others, disproportionately drawn from the poor, the less educated, from minorities, who suffered so that my friends and I could live and have a good time in the land of the free.

Over the course of my life, I have met many who went and came back. All have stories to tell. Many have looked at me with eyes that say, “You were safe, at home, you can’t understand.”

I know that.

Over the course of my life, I have come to know their heroism, their service, and thank them for it.

More than any other of our nation's wars, the Civil War was a great loss. The Civil War accounts for one half the American military war deaths. Close to two and a half percent of the population died. By some calculations, that is about 400 people a day – a 747-400 full of people crashing - every day, for four years.

All wars, but most particularly the Civil War, raise questions of theodicy: How can a just and merciful God allow such death and loss? What was all this pain and suffering for?

We don't often think of Abraham Lincoln as a theologian. Yet, on March 4, 1865, he delivered - in his Second Inaugural Address - one of the greatest pieces of practical theology ever written. It's short, two pages.

In those two pages, toward the end of the Civil War, he tried to make meaning out of the experience. Let me quote from his speech, for I think it applies to all wars.

Neither party expected for the war the magnitude or the duration which it has already attained. ... Each looked for an easier triumph, and a result less fundamental and astounding. Both read the same Bible, and prayed to the same God; and each invokes his aid against the other. ... The prayers of both could not be answered – that of neither has been answered fully.

Fondly do we hope – fervently do we pray – that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet, if God wills that it continue until all the wealth piled by the bondsman’s two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil should be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn by the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still must it be said, “The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.”

With malice toward none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation’s wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan – to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves, and with all nations.

A little more than thirty years later, on Decoration Day, May 31, 1897, the monument to the Massachusetts 54th. Regiment and its commander, Robert Gould Shaw, was dedicated in Boston. You may have seen the monument; it is featured in the closing credits of the movie, *Glory*.

More than a generation had passed since Lincoln’s speech. The Civil War was fading into memory – “monumental men in bronze and marble” – much as the Viet Nam war is fading into memory now. You know that President Obama does not remember Viet Nam? For him, for everyone under fifty or so, for many of us here, the Viet Nam War is history, something you read about in books.

The keynote speaker at the dedication that day was William James, the philosopher and founder of the discipline of psychology. William James, like me, had been physically unfit to fight in the war of his generation. As he spoke, I can imagine him remembering his brother, Garth Wilkinson James, who had served in the Massachusetts 54th, who had been terribly wounded in his legs and feet during the attack on Fort Wagner and whose life after the war - they didn't know about Post Traumatic Stress Disorder in those days, he died in the 1880's, in his thirties - whose life after the war had been a physical, emotional and financial wreck.

As William James looked back in memory, of lives destroyed, of dreams "Someday" not quite realized (African Americans had been freed, but "Jim Crow" segregation was becoming the law of the land), I think he was he was also looking over the horizon, into the future, at a century or more of wars to come: We have been soaked in war. This past century has been soaked in war: the Spanish American War, the Philippine Insurrection, the interventions by the United States in Latin American nations during the second and third decade of the 1900's, the First World War, the Second World War, the Korean War, the Viet Nam War and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

On that day in 1897, William James cautioned, "Every war leaves ... miserable legacies, fatal seeds of future war and revolution, unless the civic virtues of the people save the State in time."

The miserable legacies, the fatal seeds, are all around us, still. We are just now addressing them again, 150 years later, in Charleston, in South Carolina, in our nation, in the social media, on the pages of our newspapers and magazines, perhaps with our friends and in our own families.

Abraham Lincoln struggled to find meaning for the scourge of the Civil War. He saw in it a judgment of our nation's failures, a result of the poison of slavery.

William James, remembering his brother and all the dead, fearful of the history he saw unfolding, presented an antidote. He said,

The nation blest above all nations is she in whom the civic genius of the people does the saving day by day, by acts without external picturesqueness; by speaking, writing, voting reasonably; by smiting corruption swiftly; by good temper between parties; by the people knowing true men when they see them, and preferring them as leaders to rabid partisans or empty quacks. Such nations have no need of wars to save them. Their accounts with righteousness are always even; and God's judgments do not have to overtake them fitfully in bloody spasms and convulsions.

Last month and just this past week, there have been celebrations. Words have been said. The dead have been honored.

All that is fitting and proper.

We look to the past and remember.

Let us also honor the dead by looking forward.

Let us look for that “age of gold” we sang about.

Let us consider

There is more work to be done.

How are we, as individuals, but more importantly as a congregation, to finish the work the Civil War began? How are we to bind up the nation’s wounds? How are we, with the veterans of all our wars, going care for those who shall have borne the battle, and for their widows, and orphans? How will we achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves, in this congregation, in this city and state, in our nation, and with all nations?

How will we, as individuals, as a congregation, honor the words of William James, which ask us to be reasonable, to avoid corruption, to respect the other, and to choose our leaders wisely?

There is more work to be done.

Offertory

Welcoming Guests & Visitors

* **Hymn:** #211 We Are Climbing Jacob’s Ladder

**Closing Words & Extinguishing of the Chalice: *Memorial Day Prayer* (adapted) –
Barbara Pescan**

Spirit of Life
Whom we have called by many names
In thanksgiving and in anguish –

Bless the poets and those who mourn
Send peace for those who did not make the wars
But whose lives were consumed by them

For the wounded ones, and those who received them back,
Let there be someone ready when the memories come
When the scars pull and the buried metal moves
And forgiveness for those of us who were not there
For our ignorance.

Give us courage to answer the cry of humanity's pain
And with our bare hands, out of full hearts,
With all our intelligence
Let us create the peace.

Unison Response

We extinguish this flame, but not the light of truth,
the warmth of community, or the fire of commitment. These we carry in our hearts and
in our hands, until we are together again.

Closing Ritual [Optional]

"Safe Passage," Traditional Spiritual
"May you have safe passage.
Safe, safe passage.
Safe passage
Safe passage on your way.

Safe passage on your way, brother.
Safe passage on your way, sister.
Safe passage on your way, sweet children.
Safe passage on your way."

And now our service truly begins.