

## **REMEMBERING LOVED ONES ON MEMORIAL DAY!**

Memorial Day is a time for remembering those who have died in all branches of the military in service to our nation. It is also a time for family gatherings, cookouts, camping trips, going to the beach or the mountains, and kicking off the summer season. Historically it was known as Decoration Day, when military dead of the Civil War and more recent conflicts were honored. It falls near the end of the school year and also often marks the time when churches go to a more relaxed summer schedule.

I think Memorial Day weekend is also a good time for remembering all those people who have made a difference in our lives but are no longer with us. Molly Brown, who was helping me write this sermon, also reminded me that it is a good time to remember our animal companions like her sister, Toby, and her brothers Woof and Casper, who are no longer with us. Many people and animals have helped us to learn and grow and become the people that we are. Those who have served in the military and in other branches of government and social services and the Peace Corps have helped to build the strong and democratic nation that we enjoy today. Loved ones who are no longer with us have helped to shape our lives, our families and the world in which we live. We owe them our gratitude and our memories!

This morning we take time to remember those we have known, those who preceded us in countless generations of our own families, and those whose lives were given to create and secure the nation in which we live and to which we claim allegiance.

I remember and appreciate my parents, Alice and Morrie Klein. They were both Civil Engineers. Mom joined the Naval Reserve in college as a Seabee. She never went on active duty, but she believed in our country. Dad had joined the Illinois National Guard and then transferred to the

active Army, he was in the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne and was dropped in a glider in Europe to fight at the Battle of the Bulge. Raised in Chicago in a Hungarian/German Jewish family, Dad never talked about his service, just about the people he met, especially a family in Belgium. My parents and the older generations in my family are gone now. My cousins, my brother and I are the older generation, and that feels more than a little strange at times.

I think of the generations that have gone before, those I knew and those whom I knew not; all the genetic and historical influences on each of us, the things our forefathers and mothers did to help shape our families and our nation.

As I write, I am sitting under the big redwood tree in my back yard. It reminds me of the Giant Sequoias and Old Growth Redwoods who witnessed so much of the history of our nation. Many were already here when the Christian era began. The State and National Parks at which we may enjoy Memorial Day are full of forests, beaches and natural rock formations that have gone virtually unchanged for hundreds, thousands, perhaps millions of years. Some of the formations have been changed by earthquakes, floods, fires, volcanoes, ice ages, and the trees and animals have lived through many generational cycles, but the earth has existed for billions of years. Memorial Day has only been around since our American Civil War, a terrible conflict that made a huge difference just a century and a half ago, but whose influence continues to fade as the scars to families, States, and the natural world have also faded into distant memory.

Our species has only recently begun to have any impact beyond our Solar System, as the first man-made object recently passed outside the influence of our Sun. For all our self-important actions, we are an awfully small part of the whole universe. We inhabit just one little M-Class planet, we have yet to colonize our moon or a neighboring planet, let alone become the space-faring species that science fiction has been envisioning for decades.

The heroes we honor on Memorial Day fought against other tribes of our own species, our genetic brothers and sisters, at the furthest they were still from the same branch of our family tree. Therefore, I am glad that it has become a day of family celebrations rather than a display of nationalism. The earliest celebrations of this holiday, in the North and the South, were for heroes who fought against the other half of the untied states, before we re-united. Many families had members who served on opposite sides in that conflict. More recent celebrations have honored heroes who fought against nations from whom many of our ancestors came, and that seems a strange thing to celebrate, too. The day I would rather celebrate is a day of wisdom and progress, in which we recognize advances in the arts and sciences, progress that benefits not only all human beings but the other beings of earth as well.

Memorial Day, Veterans' Day, and Independence Day all have their place, for now, as we remember how much so many have given, even the ultimate sacrifice of their lives, for freedom and justice. Someday, I hope all these days are forgotten in a celebration of the success in freedom, justice, education, and human and other-species rights across all the nations of the earth and in all of the human colonies on other worlds. Heroes of the wars of the United States, and heroes of science and the arts, and of governments have brought us to this point, but we have far to go as a nation, far to go as a species.

I am grateful for the freedoms I have enjoyed all my life, for this great nation in which we live, for the mountains and the prairies, the cities and farms, and the natural areas, the people and the opportunities.

I am sad to see the inequalities and injustices, the racism, ageism, sexism, and hetero-sexism. I am saddened to see the failure of our nation to care for the poor, the mentally ill, the homeless, the jobless, the aged, and so many with needs that go beyond their accumulated resources. I am saddened that even the limited advances recently made in healthcare coverage are being fought by so many of those who have more resources than they need. I am saddened to see how the poor, the mentally

challenged, the jobless, and those with health issues are vilified for things they could not control.

Where is the justice, equality, and freedom that so many died to protect? Our nation has much to offer, but it is far from perfect. We have a long way to go to live up to the expectations, hopes, and dreams of the founders. We have a long way to go to live up to the expectations of so many who have given their lives to make this nation great. We are the most powerful nation ever in the history of the world, but we do not always use our power for good. Here is the Memorial Day challenge for all of us who claim our right as citizens of the United States, to make our nation truly great in terms of justice, equality, opportunity, and fairness to all who are citizens, and to treat all who sojourn in this land with fairness and compassion as well. Further, we are challenged to use our power for good around the globe and off into space.

There is no more fitting tribute to the service of all who have died to protect, defend, and support our nation than to make it truly a place of justice, liberty, equality, and compassion and to also become an exporter of justice, equality, and compassion in our dealings with every people and every land. I hope that we shall move in those directions.

But this is also a time for remembering the people themselves who made a difference, the men and women who gave their lives for our nation, the men and women who touched our lives and made a difference in our own lives. Who are the people that we most remember for lessons that they taught us, gifts that they gave to us? Are there men and women from our families or from families we knew who died in service of the United States of America?

In every cemetery across the United States and in many places around the world, there lie our war dead, those who did not make it home to their families and friends, who died in foreign lands and in our own land, fighting for that which they believed. Their lives should not be forgotten, nor should their deaths go un-mourned. They died to protect and defend our nation, our values, our beliefs, our way of life. They died for our

nation, imperfect as it is, as perfect as it may someday be. They died for the dream that is our nation, the dream of justice, equality, opportunity and compassion for all. They died for the ideal of our nation more than for its flawed reality. They died for the United States that the founders dreamed about, the ideal that exists only as potential, as possibility, as hope and dream. They died for the best and highest values that may someday be realized. They died for what this nation may someday become.

Our religion was shaped with those same values from the enlightenment, those same hopes and dreams and ideals, the same potential for good that also too often goes unrealized in our churches as we fight over minutiae and talk ideas to death. The founders of our religion in America were also founders of our nation, and they carried their hopes of the nation into the beginnings of our church. Our seven Principles express those values that are the best and highest of the enlightenment, the foundation of our nation in the Declaration of Independence, the greatest hope for our nation and for humankind. They are rooted in the core values of all the major religions of the world, the teachings of Jesus and Buddha, Mohamed and Confucius, and they are the lights for our path forward.

We are part of a great human multitude on a journey to the future. We can only imagine what the future may hold, but in the dreams and hopes of the past we can see an ideal that draws us inexorably forward. We have a long way yet to go, we can be distracted by many things along the way, and we will not likely cross over into the promised land, and yet we must continue forward. When we are distracted, we must find ourselves again and resume our journey, remembering those who have lived and died to make our journey possible. This is our great quest, to carry humanity forward into the future. We are called to this journey as a source of meaning for our lives, and we are called to create the pathway for our descendents, for all those who will come after us, that they will find their own sense of meaning, that they will continue the journey into the unknown possibilities that our species may someday discover. It is in this great journey, this quest for meaning, that our lives find fulfillment . Whatever heavens may or may not lie beyond this life, it is the quest, the journey, the possibility that gives meaning to human life and love. Our relationships, our

accomplishments, our goals, our hopes and our dreams are shaped by this quest and it is in this quest that the best and highest of humanity is revealed.

Today we celebrate all those who have given their lives in the quest for meaning and truth, compassion and justice, wisdom and knowledge. We give our thanks to all those in the military and all those in civilian service who gave their lives to this quest. We give our thanks to all those who have gone before who touched our lives and guided our journeys and encouraged us. May we be lights and guides for future generations, and may the quest lead our children and grandchildren to a brighter, more just and more compassionate future!

So May it Be! Amen!