

Thought for Wednesday – May 20, 2009

Back in 1998 the movie “*Saving Private Ryan*” came out starring Tom Hanks as Cpt. John Miller. The opening scenes of the movie begin with the Allied invasion of Normandy on 6 June 1944, as members of the 2nd Ranger Battalion under the leadership of Cpt. Miller fight ashore to secure a beachhead. In the middle of this battle, two brothers are killed in action. Earlier in New Guinea, a third brother is KIA. Their mother, Mrs. Ryan, is to receive all three of the grave telegrams on the same day. The United States Army Chief of Staff, George C. Marshall, is given an opportunity to alleviate some of her grief when he learns of a fourth brother, Private James Ryan, and decides to send out 8 men (Cpt. Miller and select members from 2nd Rangers) to find him and bring him back home to his mother...

The movie goes on from there to describe the search for Pvt. Ryan among the towns and countryside of France. Along the way, one of the main questions that seem to be central to everyone’s thinking is: *When is one life more important than another?*

In one of the most dramatic scenes in my opinion, after finding and rescuing Pvt. Ryan, the team finds themselves in the middle of a tremendous battle with all the bombs, gun-fire, explosions that one could handle. During this scene, Cpt. Miller is mortally wounded and is propped up against a bridge. He motions for Pvt. Ryan to come to him and in a strained, whisper says, “*Earn this! Earn this!*” and then dies...

The last scene is Ryan, now an older man revisiting the military cemetery at Normandy, visits the grave of Capt. Miller and tells his rescuer that he has tried to live a good life in exchange for the sacrifice of Miller and the rest. The scene widens to show row upon row of white crosses, each a memorial to a life given in the cause of freedom...

This Monday we celebrate Memorial Day – ***What does that mean to you?*** To me, Memorial Day is not about sales, picnics, beer, and cookouts. Yes it is a holiday that you and I will have off from work (most of us) and yes, we should enjoy the day, for those who died would want you to. Laugh, play, eat, and shop if you want to. But take a moment to remember and pray. May we honor all who have given their lives, and their families who have been left behind.

Several years ago I read this essay at a Memorial Day ceremony and I’ve kept it with me every since – It is written by Charles M. Province:

It is the soldier, not the reporter,
Who has given us freedom of the press.
It is the soldier, not the poet,
Who has given us the freedom of speech.

It is the soldier, not the campus organizer,
Who has given us the freedom to demonstrate.
It is the soldier, not the lawyer,
Who has given us the right to a fair trial.

It is the soldier,
Who salutes the flag,
Who serves under the flag,
And whose coffin is draped in the flag,
Who allows the protester to burn the flag.

Will you join me this Memorial Day and give thanks to our Heavenly Father for the gift of our freedom, as thousands of our fellow men and women paid the ultimate sacrifice that we might continue to be the land of the free. To all our brave men and women, both current and retired who have served our nation in defense of our freedom, *“Thank you for your service, bravery, and commitment to duty – And thank you for my freedom!”*

And before I close, might I add this caveat: You and I are a part of nation that has nothing to do with country, or ancestor origin – We who would call ourselves Christian find our identity in our relationship to Jesus Christ!

“Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.” (Ephesians 2:19-20)

“All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth. People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own.” (Hebrews 11:13-14)

When the children of Israel were finally entering the Promised Land, God instructed them to build a memorial from the stones of the Jordan River...

When all the people had crossed the Jordan, the LORD said to Joshua, “Now choose twelve men, one from each tribe. Tell them, “Take twelve stones from the very place where the priests are standing in the middle of the Jordan. Carry them out and pile them up at the place where you will camp tonight.””

So Joshua called together the twelve men he had chosen — one from each of the tribes of Israel. He told them, “Go into the middle of the Jordan, in front of the Ark of the LORD your God. Each of you must pick up one stone and carry it out on your shoulder — twelve stones in all, one for each of the twelve tribes of Israel. We will use these stones to build a memorial. In the future your children will ask you, ‘What do these stones mean?’ Then you can tell them, ‘They remind us that the Jordan River stopped flowing when the Ark of the LORD’s Covenant went across.’ These stones will stand as a memorial among the people of Israel forever.” (Joshua 4:1-7, NLT)

May we all be able to keep the delicate balance in our lives of being thankful and remembering our fallen heroes who have provided us with certain freedoms. But, let us also remember that only true, ultimate freedom comes from being united with Jesus Christ!

Be Strong, Be Courageous, Be Fearless – and remember...

Christ **IS** All!

Pastor Mark