

Saint Thomas and Saint Thomas of the Air Church
 Veteran's Day
 November 10, 2024
 rmceely+

“Greater love hath no man than this,
 That a man lay down his life for his friends”
 John 15:13

We step aside from my usual discourse on the Epistle and Gospel this morning.
 to discuss the Christian Significance
 Of the Remembrance of those
 Of our church family who have served and do serve their country
 In the military.

This is a day of remembering and
 I can't resist telling you a story about remembering.

It seems that Cliff ran into his old friend Fred whom he had not seen in while and the conversation came around to Cliff's recent difficulty with his memory. Cliff says “well my wife and I went to this seminar where they taught some memorization techniques and now I have a terrific memory. Fred says “how wonderful. What was the name of the seminar?. And Cliff notices his wife nearby and asks Fred, “what is the name of that flower with the long stem, large red petals at the top and it also has thorns?” Fred says “Rose?” Cliff says, yea that's it. Hey Rose honey, what was the name of that seminar we went to where they fixed my memory?

Tomorrow our Country celebrates Veteran's Day.
 A day when most of us will have a paid day off from work
 A day retailers try to sell us things we don't need at bargain prices
 But Veteran's day
 for those who are paying attention
 Is a day to remember the sacrifice of our soldiers, sailors and airmen
 Who have served and who serve today to protect our sacred freedoms
 So that we can come here today to worship God in peace.

We celebrate Veteran's Day in the US on a day of Peace
The day peace was established
Concluding an horrible war: November 11, 1918.
In these United States, we honor those who guard the Peace
And who wear the uniform and serve our Country
As well as those who have worn the uniform
And gone home to God.

So today at St Thomas
we set aside this Sunday
to remember the sacrifice that some of our own have made and are making.
I asked you to send me the names of family
Who serve today and
who have served their country.
And you responded. Oh, how you responded.
You responded with some amazing stories

In a few moments I will read their names
In Holy Communion
as we pray for them
and for the families.

We will pray for 96 men and women and their families
They span the history of our Country and have served in every conflict
From the Revolutionary War to today.

Three who earned the Congressional Medal of Honor
our countries highest honor
Our little St Thomas family is broader than the United States
So we will pray for people from the United Kingdom
From New Zealand

All with one thing in common:
They stood in the gap

You see between us and those who threaten us harm
 There is a gap.
During times of peace
 the gap is wide and its distance helps protect us.

But as tensions mount
 And hatred builds
 The gap narrows
 And the threat to our freedoms
 And our safety
 rises

At such times
 it is people
 such as those for whom we pray today
 who miraculously come forth
 and stand in the gap
 risking their very lives
 to defend us and
 to save us

There are thousands of stories. I would like to tell you one that represents all
 the others

It is February 1942, weeks after the attack on Pearl Harbor.

 Out manned
 and out gunned
 and woefully under prepared
 with inferior weapons,
 outdated ships and inferior aircraft
 Our Navy had only 3 aircraft carriers,
 One of them, the USS Lexington was headed into the fight in the
 South Pacific.

The Lex had been spotted by the Japanese and before she arrived at her duty station, 18 Japanese bombers were on their way to destroy her. The radarmen aboard the Lex found them and launched its fighter squadron to defend the ship. All but two F4F Hellcat fighters went to save the ship. While they were engaged miles away, the radarman was horrified to spot a second wave of enemy bombers. There were 8 of them headed for the Lex and there were only 2 fighters to stop them. Losing one third of the aircraft carrier fleet would certainly doom the Pacific War. The two fighters were launched and they soon found the enemy. The Hellcat fighters were slow and armed only with machine guns. As they prepared to engage and tested their weapons, the guns of one of the Hellcats jammed and was useless. That left a single airplane to fend off 8 bombers. Bombers bristling with their own machine guns all trained on a single airplane.

At the controls of that one airplane was Lt. Edward Henry O'Hare. They called him "Butch". Butch O'Hare was all that stood in the gap between the enemy and 3000 men aboard the Lex and the loss of one third of the US carrier fleet.

The Hellcat carried 450 bullets for each of its 4 machine guns enough for about 34 seconds of firing. That was all Butch had to stop 8 bombers.

Butch engaged the bombers when they were about 3 minutes from dropping their ordinance. He climbed above the enemy formation, dove on them hitting first the outside airplane on the right and then the one on the left. Both burst into flames. The formation scattered thinking they were under attack by a squadron of Americans. Butch brought down two more and severely damaged a 5th before he no longer had ammunition. There were still three headed for the ship. He knew he had no weapons to bring to bear but they didn't. Butch dove on them putting himself in the sights of their guns. He came so close as to try to collide with them, anything to stop the attack. The three broke off and headed back to their base.

Butch became the first Ace, downing 5 enemy aircraft in one very important mission.

The Lex survived the attack without a single enemy aircraft threatening her. Four months later the Lex was one of the carriers that sunk 4 Japanese carriers in the battle of Midway that changed the course of the war. She wouldn't have been there if Butch had not stood in the gap.

They flew him home to receive the Congressional Medal of Honor at the White House from President Roosevelt himself.

Butch returned to the war. But he did not survive it. He left a wife and two daughters.

Next time you fly to Chicago, think of Butch as you land. They named O'Hare International Airport after him. A replica of his F4F Hellcat fighter is parked in a hanger there in memoriam.

2000 years ago in the Holy Land there was another narrowing gap.

The children of Israel had wandered so far from God

In their morality

In their religious practices

That the Prince of the World

Satan

Was advancing rapidly toward them.

The gap

between Good and evil

Between Life and eternal death

Was narrowing.

The children of God were almost irretrievably

In the hands of Satan

The world needed a Saviour

Who could stand in the gap

And protect mankind

And send Him He did.

Jesus, the Christ

Stood in the gap

Sacrificing His life

To save us from ourselves; From our sins

I am fearful that there is another narrowing gap today.
 Christianity is under attack in our society
 And there are those who seek to marginalise Christianity
 Even one of our President has declared on March 9th 2008
 “We are no longer a Christian Nation”

The gap between us and our ever secularizing society is narrowing.
 Who will stand in that gap?

I am afraid dear friends
 It is us
 You and me

And How are we to Stand in that Gap?
 Like those for whom we pray
 It is not an easy task

By the way we lead Christian Lives
 By the way we follow Christian Principals
 By the way we love one another
 And By the way we love God
 We demonstrate to the world
 Christian Virtues

Gently, respectfully and with courtesy
 But at every opportunity
 We must confess our faith
 Explain to the ignorant
 For that is by and large who they are today
 The story of Jesus
 His incarnation
 His crucifixion, resurrection and ascension.

Some will ridicule us
 Not accept what you tell them
 Faith is not present in all people.

But in the words of St Peter;

“ . . . it is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well doing, than for evil doing”.

This from a man who knows about suffering.

So, tomorrow, remember those of the military

who stood

and who stand

in the gap

and sacrifice for our freedoms.

Especially those of this church family for whom we pray

Never lose sight of Him who sacrificed His life for our sins

We must be strong

and stand in the gap

and defend what we know to be true.