

As I get older I find myself forgetting things, like the day of the week and my cell phone number or the ages of my children. Sometimes, I have to intentionally work at remembering some things, and it is frustrating. You come home from the store, only to realize you have forgotten the primary thing that sent you there in the first place. Or you cannot remember someone's name, and you have known them for years. But while we sometimes forget things we should remember, we also remember things that we need to forget.

I have encountered many people who are haunted by a particular memory, which they cannot get out of their minds no matter how hard they try. They remember things that they would rather forget. I know that my mind is filled with totally useless information, like the words to the theme song from Gilligan's Island, the names of all of the Desperate Housewives, but other equally important information escapes me.

Memorial Day is about remembering, taking the time to intentionally remember those who should never be forgotten. It is not only a 3 day weekend to kick-off summer, but a time to recall and reflect. A time to call to mind those who have touched and blessed our lives, those who have left the world brighter and better, and those who paid the ultimate price for our freedom. We need to deliberately remember things in a culture that is prone to forget, a culture where the 1990s is ancient history.

On the 5th of May, 1868, John Logan, Commander-in-Chief of the Grand Army of the Republic, issued a general order designating May 30th, 1868 as a day "...for the purpose of putting flowers or otherwise decorating the graves of comrades who died in defense of their country during the late rebellion." He went on to say that he did this with the deep hope that the decorating of graves would continue from year to year.

General Logan's hope has been fulfilled. Calling it first "Decoration Day" and then "Memorial Day" for 139 years Americans have decorated graves and remembered those who will not grow old as we are left to grow old. It is a good and honorable thing to remember these men and women, as diverse as Robert E. Lee and Betsy Ross, and countless others who laid down their lives for the things we automatically assume are our birthrights. So many have suffered and died to preserve our way of life.

General Logan also hoped that Decoration Day would serve as a testimony to the terrible price of war. And its price is indeed terrible.

Not since the Civil War, has our country had a firsthand experience of the horrors of war. Most of us have no idea what war is really like. Even though we have been involved in a war for over 4 years now, with 3500 Americans dead and 26,000 Americans wounded, (not to mention the estimated 70,000 Iraqi civilians killed), our current war is far removed for most of us, something contained to the newspaper and evening news. We have no real idea of the horrors or brutality of war.

In Europe, where two World Wars have been fought, there are poignant reminders all over the place. The memory of World War II is still so vivid in their minds, because of the startling absence of men between the ages of 65 and 80. You just don't see many older men, because over 20 million of them were killed. War is always a terrible thing, and we owe our veterans so very much, whether they fought in World War II, Korea, Vietnam, Desert Storm, or Iraq. If you ever served in the armed services of the United States, would you please stand that we might recognize you?

It is important for us to remember these people who fought and sacrificed for our freedom. And it is also important to remember those people who have sacrificed for our benefit, those who have made us who we are--our relatives, our teachers, our neighbors and friends--all those who shaped our personalities and perspectives. None of us grow in isolation. We are blessed by communities of care, those who notice and nurture us. The people who make a difference in your life are not always the most visible, but often the ones that listen to you and care about you. The ones who take time with you, who are there for you when you need them most.

Every once in awhile I go into our Columbarium, that small room behind the sanctuary where we keep the ashes of those who have died. And when I go in there I am humbled to think of the lives, the service and sacrifice of those whose ashes are interned there. I think of the people who loved them most, and miss them still. I am reminded that no good deed, no kindness, no act of mercy is ever in vain. I think of the legacy they have left and what that means to those who come after.

I think a large part of my sadness around leaving this building is centered in the fear that future generations will forget what we have done here, that our history will become vague or obscured. I fear that what we have done and said and dreamed here might not be all that important to

those who come after. As we worked so hard last year to make sure that you knew about the distinguished 125 year history of this congregation, I thought about how terrible it would be if those things had been forgotten. If we did not care enough to remember those who left such a rich spiritual heritage for us. I pray that everything that has happened in this building--every baptism, every wedding, every funeral, every prayer, every tear, every hope and act of care will be remembered by somebody, someday.

Today we call to mind all those members who have died in the last year, and I am moved to remember them and privileged to have known most of them. Each person was dearly loved, and a blessing to their families, communities and church. We owe them so much, and they are with us still, even in death. I know that many of you have lost loved ones in this past year, and they too are with you still, in ways you cannot begin to comprehend. That is what Memorial Day is all about--deliberately remembering those who have gone before us, those whose spirit and love will always be with us.

Let us take a moment now to reflect upon those people who have blessed our journeys through life. Particularly let us remember those whose faces we see no more, but whose spirit and love are ever with us.

(Song "I Will Remember You" by Sarah McLachlan....)

At times like these, it is important to consider how we will be remembered after we are gone. Will we be remembered 50 or 100 years from now? Robert Rains once wrote a piece entitled, "The Next Twenty Years." As his birthday approached, he reflected upon his life:

"The tallest redwood trees in the world stand in the Muir Woods State Park in northern California. Their huge trunks stretch the length of a football field into the sky. That range of mountains and forest took its present shape 12 million years ago. As my birthday approaches, I have been pondering the next 20 years of my life. Standing before that tree on that coastal range, I felt the immensity of time. 12 million years from now, who will know or care what I do with my next 20 years? What does my life mean now in the context of such a future? By what values, memories, and hopes shall I weigh my options, make my choices, invest my energies, live my life? For whom and for what? Then he asks, "Where does the on-going purpose of God connect with my own meaning?"

Will any of our lives be remembered 12 million years from now or even 12 centuries from now? Whether we will be long remembered or not, we are creating a spiritual legacy. We are working to make sure that future generations know that God exists and God cares about them. It is a very good question: "Where does the ongoing purpose of God connect with my own meaning?"

I hope and pray that someday, people we do not even know will intentionally remember us, with gratitude and thanksgiving.

Let us Pray: Today we give you thanks, dear God, for all who have blessed our journeys through this life. We thank you for those dear to us, but also for those we have never met, who served and sacrificed for the things we now take for granted. For those who never had a chance to grow old, those whose lives were taken far too soon, those who died for freedom, and a greater good for all human kind. For those who have made this church what it is today. For those who have loved us, listened to us, nurtured and nourished our souls. For those who have offered God=s grace and peace to this world. For those who have a vision of a better future. Help us to be more like them, to find things worth living for that are also worth dying for. We remember with gratitude those who have gone before us and offer our hope and prayers for who will come after us. For all that has been, we say Thanks. To all that will be, we say Yes. In the meantime, may we lead lives that connect with your ongoing purpose to bless and transform this world.