

Christ the Lord Episcopal Church Pinole, CA

Celebrating Veterans Day: November 12, 2023

Veterans – being wise and prepared

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Good morning and welcome to Christ the Lord Church on the day after officially honoring our veterans. Someone wrote a poem entitled:

It Is the Veteran

It is the VETERAN, not the preacher,
who has given us freedom of religion.

It is the VETERAN, not the reporter,
who has given us freedom of the press.

It is the VETERAN, not the poet,
who has given us freedom of speech.

It is the VETERAN, not the campus [or community] organizer,
who has given us freedom to assemble.

It is the VETERAN, not the lawyer,
who has given us the right to a fair trial.

It is the VETERAN, not the politician,
Who has given us the right to vote.

We find ourselves standing on the shoulders of these giants, these veterans, who have willingly stepped into the line of fire, sacrificing their comfort, their peace, and all too often, their lives for the sake of our freedom. I would like to recognize their sacrificial service, to show honor to our heroes, and to salute the sacrifices made.

I also want to remind those who sat behind the desk, or counted inventory, or who did the mundane work that is required to keep the military system working, you too are an honored veteran, and you too are recognized. And please remember veterans may not look like what you would expect. There are many female veterans, and young people who have already served.

It is interesting that in today's scripture, we have a story about being unwise and unprepared. I am sure this resonates with any veteran or even anyone who has been in the boy or girl scouts. For those of us who are parents, we remember packing the bag filled with diapers and extra clothes which years later were filled with Band-Aids, tissues, or whatever sport equipment needed. Because we, as parents, often learned the hard way how to be prepared. Most of us have learned, like the bridesmaids in today's scripture, the need to be prepared. But there is a deeper meaning to Jesus' Gospel today. Yet it is still one that will resonate with veterans.

The famous John Wesley was asked what he would do if he knew Jesus would return at the exact time the next day. He said in effect, "I would go to bed and go to sleep; wake up in the morning, and go on with my work, for I would want Him to find me doing what he had appointed."

When I was in seminary, a fellow student was diagnosed with an advanced case of cancer and given only a few years to live. I sat down with her once and asked her what she was going to do with her life now that she knew she only had a few years to live. I was thinking (a bit on the wild side) that she was going to go on a mission trip, or maybe give all her money away.

Maybe she would stop school and go on an exotic vacation. It seemed that the possibilities could be endless. But instead, she said that she was going

to finish seminary and live her life as faithfully as possible, just as if she had many years to live. Then she looked straight at me and said, "Who knows, I might outlive you; you never know!" She ended up graduating, was ordained and served several years at a retreat center. One day, scrolling through Facebook, I saw that she had died. God had let her live for six years after her diagnosis, and she had continued her life and calling to God.

This is what our scripture is focusing on. Jesus will return, he will return for each one of us. Whether it will be in some type of worldly return, I don't know. But I know for sure that each one of us will die; therefore, Jesus will return for each of us when our time comes.

But knowing that doesn't mean we live a life devoid of meaning. Jesus is telling us to continue each day to live a life prepared in faith for our ultimate end. Each veteran knows this implicitly. We are not guaranteed tomorrow. Will you continue your life following the calling God has given you, no matter what your diagnosis or your life situation? Will you, like my friend, tend to the everyday matters and get out of bed and live a life in faithful waiting? That is the way we are supposed to live and prepare for the future. There is a balance in the Christian life between knowing that Christ might come back tomorrow; but at the same time, living as if He may not come back in our lifetime. If we go off on one extreme or the other, we end up with problems.

In our Epistle of 1 Thessalonians, Paul writes that the Lord's return is near, and so the Christians in Thessalonica should live with that in mind. But apparently, some of them thought that since the Lord's coming was so

near, they could quit their jobs, and sit at home fasting and praying and watching the sky for the clouds to be rolled up like a scroll. Paul heard about this, and so wrote his second letter to the Thessalonians to tell them that although the Lord's return was near and they needed to live in light of that, they must also live as if His coming was far off. We must be laying foundations and fighting the good fight for future generations.

This courage, born of duty and nurtured by faith, is the same courage that has propelled our veterans forward into the face of danger. It is this courage we honored yesterday and today, and try to incorporate in our everyday lives.

We need to remember that our veterans are not just heroes on the battlefield; they are our examples. They are often the unsung heroes in our communities. They are our neighbors, our friends, and our family members. Some will not even tell you they have served. They continue to serve our country and community long after their military service has ended. They continue to make a difference in the lives of those around them. We can learn from them. They understand the horror of war and the blessing of peace.

They continue to model being ready while living in faith. And we need to understand that honoring our veterans is not just about what we say, but also about what we do. Honoring God is about how we live our lives. It's about how we treat others. It's about how we serve our communities. It's about how we love one another. Make each day count - we are promised no tomorrows, for tonight the bridegroom might come. Amen