

INTENTSIONAL LIVING, PART II

Sermon, August 11, 2019

Text: Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16

Tomorrow Rhode Island commemorates Victory Day. The legal name of Rhode Island's holiday is, and always has been, Victory Day – it has never been “V-J Day” (*short for “Victory Over Japan”*), as some have assumed. It is a day we *commemorate* (*not celebrate; there is a distinction*) the end of the Pacific theatre warfare of World War II; it is not a day we intend to be in any way derogatory of the Japanese people. It is a significant, and I believe wholly appropriate, day to commemorate ... as the surrender ushered in an era of peace and freedom and liberty to a war torn world, thus saving and/or preserving the lives of many.

There has always been some slight confusion as to when this day should be commemorated; the initial surrender announcement came August 14, 1945 to the USA, but that was actually the afternoon of August 15 in Japan. The official surrender documents were signed on September 2. Rhode Islanders, who have been observing Victory Day since 1948, initially chose August 14 and then in 1968 moved the observation to the second Monday of August. All other states that had recognized this holiday have repealed it; Rhode Island and Arkansas were the last holdouts until Arkansas abolished the holiday in 1975, leaving Rhode Island the only state left still observing it. Like Del's Lemonade or Saugy hotdogs, Victory Day is a summertime tradition unique to Rhode Island! Political sensitivities may have caused other states to no longer commemorate this holiday, and I understand that to a degree, but as one RI VFW official retorted in 1988, *“Should we stop celebrating the Fourth of July because it might offend the British?”*

Yes, it is painful to remember that such a horrific, huge and violent price was paid to secure victory and liberty. But you know, it can be a good thing to remember that liberty always comes at a price, sometimes even at a terrible price. The analogy is not perfect, but each and every time we observe the Lord's Supper, we should be pained to remember another horrific, tragic and violent price paid to secure victory and liberty and life for many; victory over sin and death and our liberty to enjoy our freedom as children of God now and forever was secured by our Lord's broken body and shed blood ... and we should never stop commemorating and/or remembering that. Part of the prayer I've prayed when we observe the Lord's Supper on or near July 4th: *“Help us never to forget that all the liberty we enjoy in this great land has been secured and defended by the blood, sweat and tears of human sacrifice. And as we gather about this Table, help us never to forget that the liberty we enjoy as Your children has been secured by the blood, sweat and tears of the sacrifice of our Lord. May we exercise our freedom responsibly out of gratitude for the grace we've received. May we see freedom not so much as the right to do as we choose, but as the opportunity to choose to do what is right.”* You might say Good Friday is our real Victory Day.

On a more personal note, I am also glad we commemorate Victory Day because it more than likely spared the life of my late father in law. Some of you may remember this story, which I've told before and told in part during the Time With the Children. Charles Davis was a forward observer with the 217 Field Artillery Battalion 44th infantry, he came ashore on D-Day at Normandy, and his division went on to see some of the fiercest fighting in the European theatre. In his own words from a brief memoir he wrote: *“There have been many books written and many movies made of the Civil War, WWI, WWII, and other American wars. I have read and seen many of them, but none seem to fully capture the full impact of combat. One has to be there, experience all of the emotions, feel the mental and physical trauma, and suffer the observance of death and injury, to really understand the waste and folly of war. I am sure I can never adequately express in words the nature of combat and its effects on the soldier.”*

Charlie had especially vivid memories of the Battle of the Bulge. He told of how in the pre-dawn hours of January 1, 1945, German soldiers attacked, having been trained to scream at the top of their lungs, *“Happy New Year, Yankee buzzards ! (only it wasn't buzzards, but as there are children present, I self-censored another two syllable derogatory word that starts with b and ends with s.... so, for the written record, it was “Happy New Year Yankee bastards!”)* That's what he woke up to that New Year's Day morning in 1945 ... thousands of voices in the darkness screaming this "greeting." His future brother-in-law Virgil (*his wife's brother*) was among the many Americans killed that day; he was just twenty years old. Virgil is laid to rest in St. Avold, an American memorial cemetery in France; as some of you know, my grandfather is laid to rest about sixty miles south of there in the American cemetery at Epinal (*Virgil was killed January 1, 1945; my grandfather September 7, 1944 ... just five days after he arrived*).

After the war ended in Europe, Charlie was shipped home on the Queen Elizabeth ocean liner along with eighteen thousand other troops, arriving back in the USA seventy-four years and two weeks or so ago. He was given a few weeks furlough before he was to be shipped out again to be part of the front-line

invasion force headed for Japan. So he and Elaine, my mother in law, chose to get married in that interim; they married seventy-four years and one week ago last Thursday ... August 1, 1945. Elaine's sister was matron of honor, her Uncle Armin was the pastor, and Charlie's dad was best man. While the newlyweds were enjoying a modest honeymoon in the Ozarks, Japan surrendered (*President Truman had given the order, the bombs were dropped August 6 over Hiroshima and August 9 over Nagasaki*). The other guests at that Ozark resort joined together in a toast to the newlyweds, giving Charlie and Elaine a standing ovation; the surrender meant Charlie would not be going to Japan. For thousands like him, it most likely would've been a one way trip. Because of what's commemorated on Victory Day, his life was more than likely spared ... they went on to have children and grandchildren and to enjoy the next 66 years together (*Charlie departed Oct. 26, 2010; Elaine Feb 6, 2018*). So again, I'm glad our state still commemorates Victory Day.

We read earlier, *"By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents ... For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God."* He lived in tents. As I said last Sunday, pardon the pun, but Abraham had an "in tents" faith in a God Who had promised him great things, and he lived his life accordingly. You might say Abraham lived INTENTSIONALLY. He knew he was a sojourner, a short-timer in this world; his real home was in that eternal city whose Architect and Builder was God, and again, he lived his life accordingly ... living with his tent pegs loose in this Earth which was not his ultimate home, living in such a way as to be ready and available to go where God called him to go and to do what God bid him to do.

The writer of Hebrews reminds us we, too, are sojourners, short-timers, who, like Abraham, cling to the promises of God while we are here. This is who we are as Christians in this world. Sojourners, short-timers who are called to live obediently knowing this world is not our home, living as to *intents*-ionally invest our lives in eternal things, knowing our true citizenship is in heaven and that ultimately we will abide in the presence of God forever. Does this mean that we can't enjoy our lives here? Quite the contrary! When we know this world is not all there is ... when we know that what we do now matters in some way FOREVER, when we know we have an eternal audience watching us, cheering for us (*and grieving for us when we stumble*), when we know that one day all things will be made well and clear and whole, then and only then are we set free to live as we were created to live! Being heavenly minded has inspired Christians throughout history to do tremendous earthly good. Living INTENTSIONALLY with the hope of heaven made Christians throughout history become healers and helpers and heroes ... because being heavenly minded gives us hope, it gives us purpose, it gives us strength, and it gives us reason to do tremendous earthly good while we're here.

We may look into this a bit more next week, but for now I want to sum up three things: **First**, if we share the intense faith of Abraham, we become aware that we are playing to a higher audience than just that of people around us and we will be inspired to do great things. In a sense we are performers on the stage of this world, and our primary audience is a divine Audience of One. But there is a secondary audience as well; as the author of Hebrews intimates in the next chapter, *"Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with endurance the race marked out for us."* **Second**, if we share the intense faith of Abraham, it means that we are set free to live rightly, to live truthfully, even if we find ourselves to be in a minority ... which, in this world, is more often than not! But it won't be a minority forever! In our eternal home we will be living **the remainder of eternity** with those who value good, right-ness, righteousness, truth, integrity, honor, faith, holiness. Not only we are motivated and freed to live as we ought, but that we are motivated to tell people *why* we are doing so. Our thought is not, *"What will they think of me in this life if I try to tell them why I live as I do?"* Rather, it becomes, *"What will they think of me in the next life, if I don't tell them?"*

And finally, **third**, if we share the intense faith of Abraham, if we really believe God is in charge and has made promises to us, we know God will keep those promises. God always delivers on His promises. We are on our way to our real home. Verse 16: *"Instead, they were longing for a better country -- a heavenly one. Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them."* There is a sort of heavenly homesickness shared in the hearts and souls of the faithful ... a longing to be in our true home. At its best, this church is a fellowship of homesick folks, longing to be home with our Father in His house, in His heavenly home. And we are on our way there. We aren't there yet, but one day, we will be ... so, in the meantime, let us live like citizens of that holy kingdom, living our lives *intentsionally* in light of the promises of the One who will greet us there, face to face.

And let us never fail to remember the horrific, yet gracious, price paid to make that hope a reality for us.