

# LIVING INTENTSLY

Sermon, August 7, 2022

Texts: Genesis 15:1-6; Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-15

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. May 8 is known as VE day, for that's when the European theatre of war came to a close with the surrender of the Third Reich, but the war was still raging in the Pacific until the surrender of Japan. Victory Day is the day we commemorate not only the end of the Pacific theatre warfare of World War II; we commemorate the **end 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 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 (*our today is Japan's yesterday due to the international date line*). The official surrender documents were signed September 2. Rhode Islanders, who have been observing Victory Day since 1948, initially chose August 14 (*which is next Sunday*) and then in 1968 officially moved the observation to the second Monday of August. All other states that had recognized this holiday have long since repealed it; Rhode Island and Arkansas were the last holdouts until Arkansas abolished the holiday in 1975, leaving Rhode Island the only state left still observing it.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 Rhode Island VFW official retorted in 1988, “*Should we stop celebrating the July 4<sup>th</sup> because it might offend the British?*”

It is good to remember that such a horrific, huge and violent price was paid to secure victory and liberty for the free world. It is good to remember that liberty always comes at a price, sometimes even a terrible price. The analogy is not perfect, but each and every time we observe the Lord's Supper, as we do this morning, we should be pained to remember another horrific, huge 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 this church will never stop commemorating and/or remembering that. A prayer I've often prayed when we observe the Lord's Supper on or near July 4<sup>th</sup>: “*Help us never 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 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.*”

One might say Good Friday is our real Victory Day.

On a more personal note, I am also glad we commemorate Victory Day because Japan's surrender more than likely spared the young life of my late father in law. Some of you may know this story, which I've told before (*and told in part during the Time With the Children, where I used as my visual props his original tent and mess kit that more or less served as his home and kitchen fourteen months*). Charles Davis was a forward observer with the 217 Field Artillery Battalion 44<sup>th</sup> infantry, he came ashore on D-Day at Normandy (*losing his helmet overboard in the English Channel due to a strong bout of seasickness en route, he later secured a replacement helmet during the invasion from one of the many fallen soldiers who never reached the beach*), and his division went on to see some of the fiercest fighting in the European theatre. He was 21. In his own words from a 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 this is a family-friendly worship service, I self-censored the actual two syllable derogatory word that starts with “b” and ends with “ards.” So, in case any didn't “get” it, and 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 derogatory “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 ... five days after he arrived*). ... two of my children and I visited those sites July 2015; I had been there once before with Ann in 1988

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-seven years and eleven days ago. He was given a few weeks furlough before he was to be shipped out again, he had orders 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-seven years and six days ago ... 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 ... **he could "retire" his tent**, and go on to live in his home country with the love of his life for the next 66 years. They went on to have four children and nine grandchildren (*Charlie departed Oct. 26, 2010; Elaine Feb 6, 2018*). So again, on a personal note, I'm glad the state where I live still commemorates Victory Day.

We read earlier, *"By faith Abraham obeyed, when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. ... For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose designer, architect and builder is God."* He lived "in tents." 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 inTENTS-ly. 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 and fight the battles God called him to fight.

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, living the life He has called us to live, and fighting the battles He would have us fight. 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 *in-tents-ly* invest our lives in eternal things, knowing our true citizenship is in heaven and that ultimately we will abide in the presence of One Who loves us forever.

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, an audience that is cheering us on to good and faithful living; 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."*<sup>1</sup>

**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, forever**, with those who value good, rightness, righteousness, truth, integrity, honor, faith, holiness. Not only should that motivate and free us to live as we ought in this life, but it also serves as motivation to tell people *why* we strive to live as we do. 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: *"But as it is, they desire a better country -- a heavenly one. Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them."* Zion, the beautiful City of our God. At its best, this church is a happy fellowship of homesick folks, longing to be home with our Father in His city, in His heavenly home. And we are on our way there. As the choir sang earlier, we are marching to Zion, beautiful, beautiful Zion. 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 *in-tents-ly* 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, sacrifice made to make that hope a reality for us.

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<sup>1</sup> This was edited out due to time; I'll include it here: *"C.S. Lewis wrote in Christian Behavior: 'If you read history, you will find that the Christians who did the most for the present world were just those who thought of the next. It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this. Aim at heaven and you will get earth thrown in. Aim at earth and you will get neither.' Rather than being 'so heavenly minded that we're no earthly good,' God wants us aware of heaven so that He can use us well on earth, and thus be of immense earthly good in the day we have."*