

Greetings to all the Saints at Manatee Life,

SCRIPTURE

John 15:13 (MSG) – Larger reading: John 15:1-17

“This is the very best way to love. Put your life on the line for your friends.”

STORY

Leslie D. Weatherhead tells of two soldiers who became fast comrades during World War I. When, after an unsuccessful night sortie, one of them was missing, the second youth heard a cry from no man’s land. His commanding officer granted permission for a rescue attempt, but added: “It’s not worth it. Your friend is probably dead by this time, and you will throw your life away.” The attempt was immediately made. When, some time later, the rescuer returned, he was dragging the body of his dead comrade, and he himself was mortally wounded. Looking up to his commanding officer he said with joy: “Sir, it was worth it. When I reached him, he looked up and said to me, ‘I knew you’d come.’”

OBSERVATION

Whenever I think of Veterans Day the first thought that comes to mind is my oldest brother Ronnie who got called up during the Korean Conflict. Mom was a nervous wreck. She just knew that he would be shipped off to Korea. Well, while in basic training they discovered that Ronnie could paint large murals and pitch fastball softball. So for three years he spent painting those large insignias on the buildings and pitching for the Army Softball team. Hard duty, but somebody has to pull it.

I also remember that Mom was putting together a “care” package of cookies and other necessities. One item she included was a can of shaving cream. The aerosol cans had just hit the market. None of us ever used one before. Dad still used the brush and soap method. So, there she was in the dinning room packing the box when she said, as she picked up the can of shaving cream, “I wonder how this works?” At that point she pushed down on the dispensing button and shaving cream started to shoot out the little spout, as she got excited, pressing even harder, exclaiming, “How do you shut this thing off?” She nearly emptied the entire can before one of us grabbed the can from her. What a mess! There was shaving cream all over the dinning room. We all pitched in to help clean it up and poor Mom; she had to go get another can of shaving cream. This time she was careful not to push any buttons.

I also think of the family that was on Ralph’s (my other brother) paper route. Their son had fought in WWII and was anticipated home just days before Christmas. Instead, what they received was the knock at the door and the news that their son had lost his life just a day before he was to return to the states. What was sad was that the Christmas tree was still standing in the corner of their living room, now without any needles still on it. All of the presents were still wrapped waiting for his return that wasn’t ever going to take place. Oh, they took the morning paper and kept up with the latest news. They both continued to go off to work every day ... but their life had

stopped that fateful Christmas so many years ago. Theirs, like so many was a personal loss so deep that they just couldn't move past it.

My thoughts also take in the Viet Nam era and how close I came to being called up myself. I was in school in Nashville, TN. One Tuesday, I called home to just check in. I asked if there was any mail. Mom, bless her heart, said, "Well, not very much, but there is this letter from the Selective Service. I didn't open it. It probably isn't important." Well, at my bequest, she opened it and discovered that I was to report for active duty in Miami that Thursday. So, first thing Wednesday morning, I was in President D. D. Holt's office laying out my problem with Selective Service. I'm glad that he was a long time friend ... anyway; Dr. Holt got on the phone to my Selective Service board and informed them that I was a full time ministerial student in good standing. He dictated a letter and I sighed a sigh of relief.

Tommy Gregory did go off to serve during the Viet Nam War. Tommy was one of the leaders of our youth group. He was always pulling off a practical joke – like getting a number of us to pick up our Young Adult counselor's little Morris Minor and care it into the narthex of our church one Sunday evening. He was always good for a great laugh and ready for lots of fun. Tommy also played a mean piano. What a talented, fun loving great guy. Well, when he returned from Viet Nam the laughter was gone, he didn't really care about music. The person who came back from the war was super serious ... he was a changed man.

I also think about Lt. William Calley. Bill was in my homeroom at Miami Edison High School. While we weren't friends I still knew him and felt that he got a raw deal ... as some of the present veterans of our ongoing war. They simply become the scapegoat for other officers.

I also think about Ricky White who suffered with cancer because of the contaminated water at Camp LeJeune. All he wanted to do was make his adoptive parents proud and he contracted cancer as his reward. I know that this a hotly debated subject, but I was the one who held his memorial service and listened to the horrible stories of his suffering.

My heart goes out to those families that have lost a loved one during the various conflicts and wars we have been involved in, as well as those men and women who have returned less than the person they were when they entered military service. There is an emotional toll that is taken out on them, as well as their families. The physical toll we can see and attempt to do our best in providing the medical and rehab therapy that is required, but the emotional and mental toll often goes unnoticed.

This came to light via the Free Clinic started by Randy and Cynthia in Gainesville. They were both employed at the VA Hospital. I learned from them that a very high percentage of the homeless were veterans. These men and women learned a lot while serving in the armed forces, except how to cope with the ongoing stresses of life. They

were the ones who showed up on Monday and Thursday evenings at the Free Clinic. They were also the families which came into the church office seeking assistance in paying rent or help in paying their electric bills.

The other concern I have is for their families. I served a church in Jacksonville, FL, which is home to a naval base. I counseled a large number of domestic abuse situations during those years. We just never know the ultimate cost our men and women and their families pay.

We too often take their service for granted, but they really should be at the top of our prayer list. We give great mouth service to “thanking them for protecting us,” etc., but the real support that could come from a top notch VA, the real support for medical and counseling assistance ... for years to come, the real support of helping them readjust to civilian life, the real support of making jobs available as they return ... the real support just isn't there. Too many times they go off to fight a war and then return to fight the VA and our government for adequate and sustaining care. It just isn't fair!

Let us remember our Veterans by stepping up to hold the VA accountable for doing what is right and proper for those who have given more than their fair share of sacrifice for our country.

QUOTE:

“I dream of giving birth to a child who will ask, ‘Mother, what was war?’” ~ Eve Merriam

PRAYER:

There are too many mornings in which we simply wake up and start moving through our varied activities with seldom a thought of those who put on the uniform. Please bless these individuals for their willingness to serve our country. Remind us often that they are our neighbors who you have called us to love. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

And the faith journey continues, Pastor Jim
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Stephanie has shared a little of her music plans for Christmas Eve service. It will be awesome event. Just remember that attendance at the service is by reservation only. Please call the office with the number in your family group so we can have proper seating reserved for you.