

TITLE: "In Memory of Those Who Died..."

TEXT: Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 (OT p. 616)

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:

<sup>2</sup> a time to be born, and a time to die;

a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;

<sup>3</sup> a time to kill, and a time to heal;

a time to break down, and a time to build up;

<sup>4</sup> a time to weep, and a time to laugh;

a time to mourn, and a time to dance;

<sup>5</sup> a time to throw away stones, and a time to gather stones together;

a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;

<sup>6</sup> a time to seek, and a time to lose;

a time to keep, and a time to throw away;

<sup>7</sup> a time to tear, and a time to sew;

a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;

<sup>8</sup> a time to love, and a time to hate;

a time for war, and a time for peace.

#### Introduction – "Just a Common Soldier"

It was probably about 20 years ago. I was in a car driven by a man in our church and we had just pulled out of the church drive and were heading down South Street. He was almost 80 at the time and we got talking about the War. By "The War" I mean WWII. I told him that my dad had driven truckloads of supplies up to the front lines all across Europe during the War. This man had also driven truck in Europe.

He said, "You know Dave, ever since then, whenever I drive, I'm always on the lookout for a place to ditch the car in case we get strafed." By strafed he meant getting machine gunned by an enemy plane. Then he said, "After 45 years, you'd think I could stop."

I asked where he would go right now and quick as a flash, he said, "Right there between those two buildings, the truck would just fit."

Those who served our country in time of war, and who experienced the trauma of battle conditions, are changed for the rest of their lives. They may go back home and live out their days and SEEM like everybody else; but, inside, they are different.

This poem is titled “Just a Common Soldier” and it’s by A. Lawrence Vaincourt.

He was getting old and paunchy and his hair was falling fast,  
 And he sat around the Legion, telling stories of the past.  
 Of war that he had fought in and the deeds that he had done,  
 In his exploits with his buddies; they were heroes every one.

And tho’ sometimes, to his neighbors, his tales became a joke,  
 All his Legion buddies listened, for they knew whereof he spoke.  
 But we’ll hear his tales no longer for old Bill has passed away,  
 And the world’s a little poorer, for a soldier died today.

He will not be mourned by many, just his children and his wife,  
 For he lived an ordinary and quite uneventful life.  
 Held a job and raised a family, quietly going his own way,  
 And the world won’t note his passing, though a soldier died today.

If we cannot do him honor while he’s here to hear the praise,  
 Then at least let’s give him homage at the ending of his days.  
 Perhaps just a simple headline in a paper that would say,  
 Our country is mourning, for a soldier died today.

That’s what we DO on Memorial Day. And that is what we will do in today’s service.  
 We will mourn for the soldiers who have passed away.

### 1. “Ding Dong the Witch Is Dead”

Well, Osama bin Laden is dead; killed by American Navy seals. For some reason, the *Wizard of Oz* song, “Ding Dong the Witch Is Dead” came to my mind when I heard the news. You remember the words. The Munchkins sing:

Ding Dong! The Witch is dead. Which old Witch? The Wicked Witch!  
 Ding Dong! The Wicked Witch is dead.  
 Wake up - sleepy head, rub your eyes, get out of bed.  
 Wake up, the Wicked Witch is dead. She's gone where the goblins go,  
 Below - below - below. Yo-ho, let's open up and sing and ring the bells out

Then the Mayor and various others sing:

But we've got to verify it legally, to see if she is morally, ethic'ly, spiritually, physically, positively, absolutely, undeniably and reliably Dead

Then the Coroner sings:

As Coroner I must aver, I thoroughly examined her.  
And she's not only merely dead, she's really most sincerely dead.

Some of my ministry colleagues are sure Osama IS where the goblins go and is rotting in hell. Others actually feel bad that his life was taken. ...I have prayed for years that God would battle against the radical militant Moslems and that their leaders, including Osama bin Laden, would make mistakes and get caught and prevented from carrying out acts of violence against innocent people. And I prayed for wisdom and guidance for those looking for terrorists in this country and throughout the world. ....So, my prayers, and the prayers of many, were answered.

[But I take no JOY in the death of Osama bin Laden. In fact, I WORRY about those who really HATED him and hope that he is rotting in hell. Why? Because Jesus says:

<sup>21</sup>“You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, ‘You shall not murder’; and ‘whoever murders shall be liable to judgment.’ <sup>22</sup>But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment; and if you insult a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council; and if you say, ‘You fool,’ you will be liable to the hell of fire” (Matthew 5:21-23).

According to secular thinking, Osama was a bloodthirsty murderer and I am a nice law abiding guy. According to God, I too am a murderer.

And Jesus goes on to say:

“Do not judge, so that you may not be judged. <sup>2</sup>For with the judgment you make you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get” (Matthew 7:1-2).

I cannot AFFORD to judge Osama bin Laden ...or anyone else. ...So, I AM glad Osama bin Laden is dead, but I hope that somehow God will be able to completely recreate his life in heaven just as I hope the Lord will completely recreate mine.]

Right after the strike on bin Laden's compound, someone said, “The world is now a safer place.” Is it? ...Certainly Osama bin Laden won't be planning any more attacks on America. But others will take his place. And, in spite of the possibly diminished terrorist threat, the people of Joplin, Missouri certainly were not safe when the tornado flattened their entire town and gutted their regional hospital this past weekend.

The only safe place is in the center of God's will. ...The ONLY safe place, for you, and for me, is staying in the center of God's will. That does NOT mean that life will go the way we WANT it to OR that we will be free from problems OR that we will not die. But if we DO stay in center of God's will for us each day, we will have the Peace of knowing that Jesus is with us and that we will be with Jesus forever and ever.

## 2. "Well Tended"

Well, getting back to Memorial Day. This story comes from this year's May issue of *Guideposts* Magazine. It's by Crystal Giffin and it's titled "Well Tended."

Ever have one of those days? I'd barely slept the night before, upset over a tense phone call I'd had with my estranged daughter. Then I got up at 5:00 a.m. to help my son, Brad, deliver newspapers. Only to have us argue over something trivial. My husband couldn't find any clean socks, and blamed me for being late to his new job. The phone rang. It was a bill collector, reminding me of a past-due payment. I still had to begin home school lessons for my son Brad, clean the house, do the laundry, help my elderly mother with some errands and, to top it off, my fibromyalgia was flaring up. One of those DAYS? "Lord," I muttered, "it feels like I'm having one of those LIVES!"

"I'm going for a walk," I told Brad. "Start studying. I'll be home soon."

I headed down our road till I reached the cemetery. That's normally where I'd turn around. But I wasn't ready to go home. ...I sat down in a shady spot beneath a small willow tree and finally let my tears flow. ...The sound of an approaching car made me look up. An ancient Cadillac slowly drove past, coming to a stop a few yards away. An old man climbed out and walked to the passenger side, opened the door and helped an old woman to her feet. She leaned on a cane.

The two of them went around the back to the trunk. The rusted hinges moaned as they opened it. With great effort they pulled out a plastic milk jug filled with water. The woman struggled to carry it toward one of the plots.

I wiped my eyes, jumped up and hurried over. "Can I help you?"

“Please help my wife to our son’s grave,” the old man said. “I’m afraid she’ll fall.” The woman handed me the jug and put her arm in mine, leading me to a stone etched with a name in bronze.

I ran back to the car to help the man unload more things: a shovel, a spade, clippers, some mulch, cleaning fluid and a soft cloth. “We clean our son’s grave four times a year,” the old man said. “Every since he died in Vietnam.”

“Let me help you,” I said.

There were two small evergreens on each side of the weathered stone that needed trimming. “We planted these the first Christmas without him,” the old man said. “It was his favorite holiday.”

I listened as I snipped overgrown branches and added mulch around the roots. “He was such a sweet boy,” his mother said. “He helped me plant flowers and vegetables in my garden.”

The father told me he missed the lazy weekend afternoons he and his son spent together. “He loved to fish, but if they weren’t biting we’d go home and shoot empty cans in the yard.”

Their son joined the army right after high school. “We still keep his room just as he left it,” his mother said.

There was one last thing they wouldn’t let me do. When everything else was tidy, the woman knelt down and polished the surface of her son’s marker. Quietly, she hummed a song. Finally, she held the cloth to her chest, laid her hand on her son’s name and said goodbye. Then the couple joined hands and walked to the car. I gathered the tools and returned them to their trunk. “Thank you,” the woman said. “We do this for our son, though it’s getting harder and harder. We rarely see anyone else on the days we are here. You were a blessing.”

“It was a blessing to help you,” I said, hugging them.

I watched their car drive away then headed for the main gate. Time to get back to life. I was ready to go home. To teach my son. To do the laundry and help my mom. And to work on repairing things with my daughter.

Life is not always easy. But we HAVE a life, and we have a WONDERFUL life if we take the time to pause and count our blessings. And we have this wonderful life because so many have sacrificed their lives for our freedom.

I just read this somewhere: "If you can read this sign, thank a teacher. If you are reading this sign in English, thank a soldier."

THANK YOU to those who served our country in the Armed Forces.

THANK YOU to those who gave their lives so we can be worshipping as we please this morning here in Dryden, NY.

Conclusion – "Taps"

Those who are able, please stand. In this moment of silence, as Scott plays taps, let us each give thanks for those who gave their lives in the service of our country, The United States of America.

Scott plays Taps.

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Amen.

HYMN NO. 569 – "Battle Hymn of the Republic"