

“How Much Is More”

Faith, love and trust.

Three separate short stories this morning, and they all tie together.

Throughout the week in thinking about what I should say today, Veterans have crossed my mind. As today is Veterans’ Day, I would like to take a moment to recognize those among us who have served in the name of freedom. If you are a Veteran, or a current Service Person, I would invite you to stand and be recognized.

(Pause)

History of Veterans Day:

World War I ended on November 11, 1918, with the signing of the Armistice by the Allies and Germany. In the first Armistice Day proclamation in 1919, President Woodrow Wilson called for the nation to remember those who had died in their countrys service and to make the day an opportunity for America to "show her sympathy with peace and justice in the councils of the nation."

In 1927 Congress called for the display of the U.S. flag on government buildings, and in 1938 Congress called for the observance of Armistice Day in churches and schools — again dedicating the day to the cause of world peace.

Note the order here: the nation was telling the churches to celebrate this day. This was not an initiative arising from the churches, but from Congress. The timing was significant. The strong stirrings of World War II had already begun in earnest in Europe. The United States was still reeling from the effects of World War I and the Great Depression, and the political climate overall was against any sort of engagement in wars.

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Of course, within just three years, the United States became involved in the War "over there" in Europe and "way out there" in the Pacific.

Since the end of World War II, observances of Armistice Day have been held all over the nation, but especially in our national cemeteries and monuments and at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Washington, D.C. The president and many state governors have issued proclamations. Countless communities, veterans groups, and civic clubs and organizations have held local observances. Armistice Day became Veterans' Day by an act of Congress in 1954, changing its purpose and scope. President Eisenhower called on the nation to remember the sacrifices of those who fought in all our nation's wars, to celebrate the contributions of all veterans of military service, and to rededicate ourselves to the task of promoting an enduring peace. It is Eisenhower's call that remains the three-fold purpose of Veterans' Day: remembering those who fought and died, celebrating all veterans, and promoting an enduring peace.

Our scriptures today are appropriate for recognizing those who have trusted in the name of love, and have given all, guided by their faith for the protection and promotion of peace.

In the past, I have worked with a number of Veterans, listened to their stories, saw pain in their eyes and bodies as they explained things to me that they would never reveal with their loved ones. War does something to all of us.

Even my classmates at the Citadel before going overseas dealt with the hard and harsh realities of going to war to fight for freedom and peace.

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As more Veterans come home with PTSD, we in caring professions take note. As Veterans come home, they often experience reentry into the workforce challenging, if at all available.

As a faith community, we are called to pray for those who have served and are serving to maintain freedoms and seek justice for the exploited and oppressed persons.

So, I’m lead to share what I hear in the scriptures today.

We just heard the sweetened condensed version of Ruth. It’s fair to say that we skipped over some juicy details. Ruth shows up in faith and trust. God has chosen her, against all odds, to serve in the lineage of David and ultimately of Jesus. Ruth lays down with this man whom presumably she knows nothing about. She trusts him. And despite all of the possibilities we can think of, Boaz accepts her and treats her very well. He marries her, establishing honor in this lineage, and settles the estate matters to include her. Not too bad for a first date. And certainly much better than many of the relationship outcomes in the Hebrew Bible. The book of Ruth is a short, four chapters.

And the widow’s mite? She gives two pennies. And it gets a lot of attention from Jesus. I remember this story from when I was a child. I know this because I get into an Elementary mindset when I consider this text. I remember the children’s sermon being about giving God all you have. That’s a message of sacrificial giving. And on the surface that is exactly what this message is about.

But, we are forced to look more closely. Because this message is also filled with warnings. Be aware of the scribes. Be aware of the ones who “devour the houses of the widows.” There’s a great spiritual difference between coercing someone else to give

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financial resources, time and talent, and the one who freely gives those gifts without pressure.

Talk about dropping out of Duke.

Not telling anyone/parents.

Talk about being embarrassed you couldn't hang w/ folks at Duke.

Talk about running out of money to the point of being poor and having to get a job as a barista at starbucks.

Share about going to church in Durham and how the pastor there was trying to start a Salkehatchie ministry.

He shared some statistics, and suggested that our pocket change and bills were abundance. He shared that when you know your bills are being covered and you have no worry about when you will eat next, then the loose cash you carry is extra. He also shared the need. People all over the globe need simple decent housing, and we can help make it happen. Now, Salkehatchie has done a great deal of working this challenge, but as we can see in our own communities in Fairfield, the need still exists. Then, he did something that I was not expecting. He challenged us to put all of our money in the offering plate that morning to go towards housing needs for Salkehatchie. And we did. I remember I had a twenty dollar bill on me. I had given way more to Salkehatchie in the past, but this meant more to me. You know why, B/c I was living in the poverty level at the time. There were times that I wondered if the bills might get paid, or if I would have to skip a meal that day. And yet, I don't remember those things. I believe the bills got paid, the rent got paid and I was able to eat. What I learned that morning was how much in truly giving costs. Or in other words, how much “more” is. It is that I gave out of my faith that made all the

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difference. And, I was able to believe that so many people were also giving out of their faith. My \$20 was not going to build a house. But with the gifts of everyone else, together we were doing something big! This is a spiritual activity and includes intention. It is a matter of the heart, it is a heart issue. When we give out of our faith, we can do amazing things together! God chooses us. Some of us have been wrestling with this for years. Others of us are hearing this for the first time. God chooses you. As people of faith, we are representing God. I trust that this carries out into our daily lives and that we work with it. We can trust that others experience the light within us. So, how are we behaving as God's people? The message in Hebrews shares: “...so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin, but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.” Have you ever seen a child eagerly await something? Like grandma, or an ice cream cone, or a birthday present? When Christ appears for the second time, it will not be to deal with sin. “But to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.” I wonder if when we do God's work this week, we can jump into the tasks at hand with a little more excitement, a little more enthusiasm, a little more trust, with all of our faith, and to be God's love in the world around us.

Let us pray: