

Willow River Parish: Clear Lake, Deer Park, and Faith Family

Title: Peace Through Sacrifice

Lesson: John 14:23-29

²³ Jesus replied, "Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. ²⁴ Anyone who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me.

²⁵ "All this I have spoken while still with you. ²⁶ But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. ²⁷ Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

²⁸ "You heard me say, 'I am going away and I am coming back to you.' If you loved me, you would be glad that I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I. ²⁹ I have told you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe.

Friends, today is the Sixth Sunday of Easter. The Easter season is drawing to a close. In this spirit, let us share the Easter greeting we have exchanged throughout this season: *Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed!*

Today is also the eve of Memorial Day. We gather this Memorial Day weekend to honor those who gave their lives for this country. It is a time to remember those who fought in the face of danger for our freedom, a time marked by gratitude, reflection, and seriousness.

In Korea, we observe June 6th as our own Memorial Day, a day to honor those who sacrificed for our nation, much like the way you commemorate Memorial Day here. In this sense, there is a cultural connection between us through Memorial Day. However, as a Korean pastor, preparing a sermon for the eve of Memorial Day can feel a bit challenging or delicate. The same message can carry different meanings depending on whether it is spoken by a Korean or an American, and those listening may interpret it in various ways. For this reason, when preparing for this service, I take extra care to avoid misunderstandings or missteps due to cultural differences.

Yet, year by year, as I worship with you on this day, I am learning more deeply the profound significance of Memorial Day. As a Korean pastor

serving this community, I seek to connect the history of my homeland with the history of this place, finding a path toward the hope of Christ.

Today, we reflect on the words of Jesus in John 14:23-29. This passage, spoken as Jesus prepared his disciples for his departure, offers us a lens through which to view Memorial Day—not merely as a day to look back, but as a day to move forward with the hope of Christ’s peace.

Memorial Day is a day to remember sacrifice. Across the nation today and tomorrow, families will visit cemeteries, place flags on graves, and share stories of loved ones who never returned. These are the ones, as Abraham Lincoln said, who gave “the last full measure of devotion.” Their sacrifice made possible the freedoms we cherish—freedom to worship, to speak, to live without fear. As a Korean, I think of my own country’s history, marked by the scars of war and division. I reflect on the American soldiers who fought alongside Koreans in the Korean War, their sacrifices playing a vital role in preserving South Korea’s freedom. Sacrifice is a universal language that transcends borders. It speaks of love, duty, and devotion to others.

In today’s scripture, Jesus speaks of another kind of sacrifice, one that resonates deeply with the spirit of Memorial Day. He was preparing to lay down his life on the cross. In verse 23, Jesus says, “Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.” This is a promise rooted in love. Jesus’ sacrifice was not for his own gain but for our salvation. It reflects the sacrifices of soldiers who gave their lives for freedom and peace.

But Jesus does not stop at sacrifice. He goes further, speaking of peace. In verse 27, he says, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives.” What a remarkable promise! The peace Jesus offers is unlike the world’s peace. The world’s peace depends on circumstances or the absence of conflict, but Jesus’ peace sustains us through life’s storms, through the sorrow of loss, through the memories of war. His words, “Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid,” become an anchor for us.

On Memorial Day, we remember that the sacrifices of soldiers were made in pursuit of peace. Yet, we also recognize that true, lasting peace comes only through Christ. The world's peace is fragile, easily shattered by division, fear, or conflict. But Christ's peace is unshakable, rooted in his victory over sin and death.

How do we honor those who have sacrificed? We remember. During our young people's time this morning, we watched a video that helped us understand the meaning of Memorial Day. It showed us images of courage, service, and lives given for others. But remembrance is more than looking back; it is about carrying forward the values for which those sacrifices were made. In verse 26, Jesus promises the Holy Spirit, who "will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you." The Spirit reminds us not only of past events but of the truth of Jesus' teachings, his love, and his sacrifice.

Memorial Day is not just a single day; it is a call to live out the values of those sacrifices in our daily lives. We honor them by upholding justice, freedom, and love for one another. As Christ's disciples, we do this by keeping his teachings, loving as he loved, and seeking the peace he gives.

So, what does this mean for us today? First, gratitude. We give thanks for those who gave their lives, for their courage, and for the freedoms we enjoy because of them. Second, commitment. We commit to remembering—not just today, but every day—by living lives of service, compassion, and justice. Third, hope. The peace of Christ is not just for us; it is for the world. As we remember the sacrifices of the past, we are called to be peacemakers in the present, sharing Christ's love with our neighbors, our community, and even those who seem different from us.

As a Korean pastor serving this community, I have learned that love and sacrifice transcend borders and cultures. Whether it is the sacrifice of a soldier on the battlefield or the quiet sacrifice of a parent, a teacher, or a friend, all of these point to the greatest sacrifice of all—Jesus on the cross. His sacrifice brings us peace, a peace that sustains us through grief, uncertainty, and life's challenges.

This Memorial Day, let us honor the fallen by remembering their sacrifice, giving thanks for their courage, and living out the peace of Christ. Let us remember the past while building a future filled with love and peace. May the Holy Spirit remind us of Jesus' words, guide us in his truth, and fill us with his peace. And may we, as the body of Christ, become a community that shares that peace with the world.

To conclude, I want to share with you a poem by John McCrae, *In Flanders Fields*, as a way to reflect on the sacrifices we honor today:

In Flanders Fields

By John McCrae

In Flanders fields the poppies blow
Between the crosses, row on row,
That mark our place; and in the sky
The larks, still bravely singing, fly
Scarce heard amid the guns below.

We are the Dead. Short days ago
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
Loved and were loved, and now we lie
In Flanders fields.

Take up our quarrel with the foe:
To you from failing hands we throw
The torch; be yours to hold it high.
If ye break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
In Flanders fields.