

Lutheran Church of the Master
580 Kuhn Road, Carol Stream, Illinois 60188
Curt Gerald, Interim Pastor
May 23/24, 2009
7th Sunday of Easter – Memorial Day Weekend
“An Unstoppable Force.”
Erwin Raphael McManus, *an Unstoppable Force*, pages 4-21

Acts 1:15-17, 21-26 (New International Version)

¹⁵In those days Peter stood up among the believers^[a] (a group numbering about a hundred and twenty)
¹⁶and said, "Brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled which the Holy Spirit spoke long ago through the mouth of David concerning Judas, who served as guide for those who arrested Jesus—¹⁷he was one of our number and shared in this ministry."

²¹Therefore it is necessary to choose one of the men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, ²²beginning from John's baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us. For one of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection."

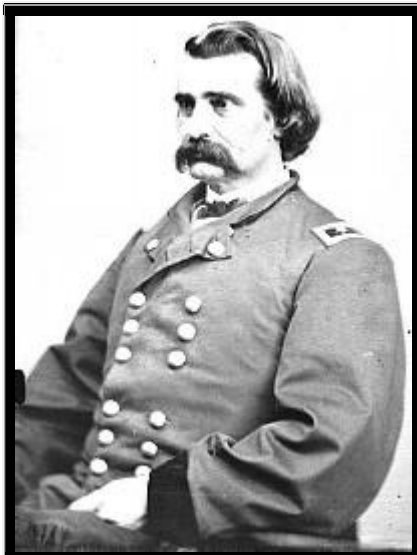
²³So they proposed two men: Joseph called Barsabbas (also known as Justus) and Matthias. ²⁴Then they prayed, "Lord, you know everyone's heart. Show us which of these two you have chosen ²⁵to take over this apostolic ministry, which Judas left to go where he belongs." ²⁶Then they cast lots, and the lot fell to Matthias; so he was added to the eleven apostles.

John 17:6-19 (New International Version) Jesus Prays for His Disciples

⁶"I have revealed you^[a] to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word. ⁷Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you. ⁸For I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me. ⁹I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours. ¹⁰All I have is yours, and all you have is mine. And glory has come to me through them. ¹¹I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name—the name you gave me—so that they may be one as we are one. ¹²While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me. None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction so that Scripture would be fulfilled. ¹³"I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them. ¹⁴I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. ¹⁵My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. ¹⁶They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. ¹⁷Sanctify^[b] them by the truth; your word is truth. ¹⁸As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. ¹⁹For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.

<http://www.usmemorialday.org/backgrnd.html>

Memorial Day, originally called Decoration Day, is a day of remembrance for those who have died in our nation's service. There are many stories as to its actual beginnings, with over two dozen cities and towns laying claim to being the birthplace of Memorial Day. There is also evidence that organized women's groups in the South were decorating graves before the end of the Civil War: a hymn published in 1867, "Kneel Where Our Loves are Sleeping" by Nella L. Sweet carried the dedication "To The Ladies of the South who are Decorating the Graves of the Confederate Dead" (Source: Duke University's [Historic American Sheet Music, 1850-1920](#)). While Waterloo N.Y. was officially declared the birthplace of Memorial Day by President Lyndon Johnson in May 1966, it's difficult to prove conclusively the origins of the day. It is more likely that it had many separate beginnings; each of those towns and every planned or spontaneous gathering of people to honor the war dead in the 1860's tapped into the general human need to honor our dead, each contributed honorably to the growing movement that culminated in Gen Logan giving his official proclamation in 1868. **It is not important who was the very first, what is important is that Memorial Day was established. Memorial Day is not about division. It is about reconciliation; it is about coming together to honor those who gave their all.**



General John A. Logan

Library of Congress, Prints &
Photographs Division, [LC-B8172- 6403
DLC (b&w film neg.)]

Memorial Day was officially proclaimed on 5 May 1868 by General John Logan, national commander of the Grand Army of the Republic, in his [General Order No. 11](#), and was first observed on 30 May 1868, when flowers were placed on the graves of Union and Confederate soldiers at Arlington National Cemetery. The first state to officially recognize the holiday was New York in 1873. By 1890 it was recognized by all of the northern states. The South refused to acknowledge the day, honoring their dead on separate days until after World War I (when the holiday changed from honoring just those who died fighting in the Civil War to honoring Americans who died fighting in any war). It is now celebrated in almost every State on the last Monday in May (passed by Congress with the National Holiday Act of 1971 (P.L. 90 - 363) to ensure a three day weekend for Federal holidays), though several southern states have an additional separate day for honoring the Confederate war dead: January 19 in Texas, April 26 in Alabama, Florida, Georgia, and Mississippi; May 10 in South Carolina; and June 3 (Jefferson Davis' birthday) in

Louisiana and Tennessee.

Following the devastation of the Civil War, the origin of this day was an action of reconciliation ... one of many steps to bring a war torn nation back together again. I suppose there are still those folks in the South who still, 140 years later, hold the Confederate flag in high esteem. It was their ancestors who died for that cause.

And for those of us rooted in the North, we honor the tradition of the Stars and Stripes which was a 35-Star Flag then. This Flag became the Official United States Flag on July 4th, 1863. A star was added for the admission of [West Virginia](#) (June 20th, 1863) and was to last for 2 years. The two Presidents to serve under this flag were [Abraham Lincoln \(1861-1865\)](#) and [Andrew Johnson \(1865-1869\)](#).

This weekend's celebration was first of all a remembrance of that war between families, between states, on this continent, as our forbearers were working out a big family squabble that could have left this a big division line across the belly of the North American Continent between the Canadian line and the Mexican line.

Through the years, it has expanded from remembering the Civil War dead to remembering all men and women killed in war efforts to remembering all who have died. In essence, what All Saints Sunday has been in Christianity since the 9th Century in this Common Era, Memorial Day has become for our nation. We remember those who have died ... no longer just those who died bearing arms ... but all who have died before us.

This is a day when we go to cemeteries, either in cars or in our mind's eyes, and we look at those engraved headstones or foot markers and see the name ... usually our family name ... and we see things like:



And there we see ... a family name ... the person's name ... the year of the person's birth ... and the year of the person's death ... separated by a dash.

The dash between the years matters most

[Topeka Capital-Journal, The](#) , [Apr 8, 2004](#) by [Capital-Journal](#)

We've all seen it between the years of birth and death --- we've seen it in bibliographies and historical reports. It's simply a dash that indicates a lifetime.

What we don't know is all the dash represents.

Actually, the dash is just as important, possibly more important, than the dates given. A poem by an unknown author calls attention to this idea. I've omitted some of the verses, but here is the gist of how the writer explained that how we spend the dash is what's important.

I read of a man who stood to speak
at the funeral of a friend.
He referred to the dates on her tombstone
from the beginning to the end.

He noted that first came the date of birth
and spoke the following date with tears,
but he said what mattered most of all

was the dash between those years.

For that dash represents all the time
that she spent alive on earth
And now only those who loved her
know what that little line is worth.

For it matters not, how much we own;
the cars...the house...the cash,
What matters is how we live and love
and how we spend our dash.

So when your eulogy's being read
with your life's actions to rehash
Would you be proud of the things they say
about how you spent your dash?

(Actually, it is not a poem by an unknown author ... the poem was copyrighted in 1996 and attributed to Linda Ellis.)

(This poem inspired another person to remember a song entitled) "Three Wooden Crosses" in a concert performed by Legacy, the outstanding Topeka- based bluegrass band. It seemed to me that while the words and the setting were not the same, the theme of the song was pretty close to that poem. At my request, band member Steve Ladner was good enough to send the lyrics to me so I could share them here:

A farmer and teacher, a hooker and a preacher
riding on a midnight bus bound for Mexico;
One headed for vacation, one for higher education,
and two of them were searching for lost souls.
That driver never ever saw the stop sign,
an eighteen wheeler can't stop on a dime.

Chorus:

There are three wooden crosses on the right side of the highway;
why there's not four of them, Heaven only knows. I guess it's

not what you take when you leave this world behind you,
it's what you leave behind you when you go.

That farmer left a harvest, a home and 80 acres,
and the patient love for growin' things
In his young son's heart.

And that teacher left her wisdom
in the minds of lots of children,
she did her best to give them all a better start.

That preacher whispered, "Can't you see the promised land"
as he laid his blood-stained Bible in that hooker's hand.

That's the story that our preacher told last Sunday
as he held up that blood-stained Bible
for all of us to see.

And he said, "Bless the farmer and the teacher
and the preacher
who gave this Bible to my momma
who read it to me."

Like most bluegrass songs, this one tells a story and as is often the case, a sad one. Still, it has a surprisingly happy ending, the prostitute who survived the crash was the mother of the preacher telling the story. But whether we are talking about dashes between the dates of birth and death or crosses on the right side of the highway, the message is that it's not what you take when you leave this world behind you, it's what you leave behind when you go.

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The length of the dashes on the gravestones is usually artistically designed to balance the two dates on its sides ... but we know that the length of that dash in human years is the difference between the date of birth and the date of death ... and that length may be seconds, minutes, hours, days, months, years, decades, and perhaps even a century or more.

All too often, the point is that the length of the dash in human years is far too short. For whatever reason, the person whose remains are interred at that spot simply died too soon. The young military man or woman ... the young person shot in a drive by killing ... the baby who had too many complications at birth ... the young person who was killed on prom night because of careless driving under the influence of alcohol ... the family whose home blew up ... the intergenerational passenger list on the plane that went down ... the women who died from breast cancer ... the men who died from prostate cancer ... those who died from heart attacks, over-eating, starvation, drug overdose, drug unavailability ... and those who, like my parents, died as they approached 100 and were wondering why the Lord was taking so long because they were ready years ago ...

This weekend reminds us that the length of that dash in human years is unknown and uncertain for any of us. We can be sure of only two things ... there was a date on the left ... and there will be a date on the right ... and right now, for those of us who are alive today, we are living the dash in between.

And this is what “an Unstoppable Force” is all about ... because as long as we have not yet arrived at the date on the right, there is this unstoppable force that is available to each of us so that the dashes between the dates of our births and the dates of our deaths might be filled to the brim with actions of reconciliation ... with random acts of kindness ... with decisions to chose love over hatred ... with the willingness to try new roads into the future rather than sit comfortably in the old ways of the past ... to keep reading and loving and singing and sharing the Story of Jesus and His Love ... so that we might keep living that story out by daily discipleship and constantly fighting for the victory of love.

That we still bury men and women as casualties of war proves that the Church has not yet accomplished its mission. The vision of the Prophet Micah is still waiting fulfillment through the work of the Church:

Micah 4

The Making of God's People

¹⁻⁴ But when all is said and done,
God's Temple on the mountain,
Firmly fixed, will dominate all mountains,
towering above surrounding hills.
People will stream to it
and many nations set out for it,
Saying, "Come, let's climb God's mountain.
Let's go to the Temple of Jacob's God.
He will teach us how to live.
We'll know how to live God's way."
True teaching will issue from Zion,
God's revelation from Jerusalem.
He'll establish justice in the rabble of nations
and settle disputes in faraway places.
They'll trade in their swords for shovels,
their spears for rakes and hoes.
Nations will quit fighting each other,
quit learning how to kill one another.
Each man will sit under his own shade tree,
each woman in safety will tend her own garden.
God-of-the-Angel-Armies says so,
and he means what he says.

⁵Meanwhile, all the other people live however they wish,
picking and choosing their gods.
But we live honoring God,
and we're loyal to our God forever and ever.