

“Called to Remember” Pastor Fritz Wiese 30 May 2010

Well, on this Holy Trinity Sunday, grace and peace to you from God our Father, Jesus the Risen Redeemer, and the Holy Spirit, through whom God's love has been poured into your heart. Amen

Let's start today by briefly referencing the congregational letter that was sent out this Thursday. Just in case it has not reached some of your homes yet, let me share that this week, I sent a letter sharing that after several months of prayer, sleepless nights, conversation, dreaming, and discernment, the Wiese family feels that the Holy Spirit is calling us to serve Christ's church at a new congregation. After talking with congregations in Colorado, Georgia, and Virginia, I'll be accepting a call to serve as senior pastor of Christ Our Shepherd Lutheran Church in Peachtree City, Georgia, which is just southwest of Atlanta. It is similar to Epiphany in the sense that it is mission-minded, trying to make disciples through varied worship styles, a strong commitment to spiritual growth, and dynamic servanthood. Like Epiphany was a few years back, they need to find more space for ministry and are ready to purchase land for multi-site ministry.

As you'll read in my letter, this decision is so difficult because we love Epiphany and Epiphany's people so much! (You have to put your emotions in the freezer.) What a sensational 14 years we've had with you—those early days with Pastors Larry and Becca were a blast with new worship services and liturgies, Crude Arts Festivals, local and global partnerships with Vineyards and Germany, the TNT (twenties and thirties ministry). And every year since then, Epiphany has been a ministry teeming with new disciples, new faces, new staff, new opportunities to serve our Lord and his people together. With Pastors Sara, Todd, and John, the Springboro campus is ready to take off. It's been a wonderful ride for which my family will forever be grateful. We will TREASURE life-long relationships and what we all accomplished together for Christ.

Anyway, I don't want this news to be the focus of the sermon today, but did want to bring us all up to speed. I'll continue to serve through the end of July, so that will provide time to say farewell, transition ministries, and for my daughter Morgan to enjoy our summer musical, Seussical. Until then, it's my delight to love God and love our neighbors with you, so let's get going with the sermon.

Memorial Day Weekend. First observed in 1868 when the graves of Union and Confederate troops in Arlington National Cemetery, Congress made the 3 day weekend official in 1971. Since then, it seems to have evolved into a time when we remember not only those who have died serving our country, but those who have served or continue to serve as well. For many of us, it's also a time to remember our loved ones past. Remembering is a part of who we are as humans, and essential to who we are as people of faith. Isaiah 49 commands us to "**Remember** the former things, those of long ago; I am God, and there is no other." Hundreds of times, Scripture commands us to remember who and whose we are.

Oftentimes, however, we are more inclined to forget than to remember. There was a group of 40 year old buddies who re-connected at their high school class re-union. They had a ball re-living glory days, so much so, they said, hey let's get together tomorrow for lunch before we all leave, at the Sunset Café. Supposedly they've got really good looking waitresses. 10 years pass and they want to re-connect. They're all 50 years old now. Let's go to the Sunset Café; they've got really good food. 10 years pass, they're 60 now, let's go the Sunset Café, we hear they have this beautiful view from the deck. 10 years, they're 70, let's Sunset Café, they've got this ramp up to the door, a little easier to enter. They turn 80, then 90, let's try the Sunset Café—after all, we've never been there before.

On this Memorial Day Weekend, let's remember at least 4 attributes about who we are as Christians: saints and sinners, servants and soldiers.

First of all, there is power and health in remembering that we are sinners. I join many of you in being simply disgusted with this oil spill in the gulf. It is maddening to ponder the devastation and hear there is no solution yet. I wonder, however, if that's a challenging illustration with which we consider our sinfulness. For me, there is toxic force always bubbling within my depths, and despite my good intentions to harness it, restrict it, contain it, my sin ends up polluting my relationships with God, with my wife, my family and friends. My sin clogs, stains, mucks up a lot of the blessings God has given me in my life.

As individuals, each of us can be honest about our pollution problem, about the sin spill in our own lives. Corporately, we can do the same

thing. In our institutions, we let greed support easy money financial schemes that contribute to our nation's economic health. Like the owners of the oil rig in the gulf, we can cut corners with our stewardship responsibilities. As nations, even in the face of legitimate enemies, we must admit we have not leaned into Jesus blessing of the peace-makers. We're slow to listen to Jesus' charge to forgive 7 times 70, and to strive for justice, and more quick to pick up arms. And therefore we endure days like this, when we must remember those killed, orphaned, or made homeless in battle. In our families we struggle with our temptation to enter conflict with greater zest than compromise. Each of you has a list of how your sin, our sin, pollutes our lives, our souls, our futures.

But friends, Christian remembering tells us that "while we were still sinners, (stuck in this foul flow) Christ died for us," as Romans 5 promises, and has made us **saints** through the power of the Spirit. You can deny your sinfulness, just like someone with cancer can ignore their terminal disease. Your choice. But as 1 John says, when we confess our sin, God who is faithful and just will forgive our sin and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. When we remember, as we do on Ash Wednesday, that we are dust and to dust we will return, we have a chance to embrace an alternative--God's hope in Jesus.

I guess we're still waiting to hear if BP engineers have been successful in stopping the oil leak with this top kill procedure. But God's engineer, Jesus Christ the carpenter, went to a cross to execute his own "top kill." Jesus figured out the way to stop the suffocating stream of sin choking our lives, to let us breathe with him afresh in the kingdom of God. As Lutherans, we recognize that here on earth, we will always live in the dialectic tension of being saints and sinners, but we remember that clean, baptized saints is our full future. Isn't that an image, we'd love to bring to the gulf? That through Christ, and not chemical dispersants of good works or our own efforts, our stains are washed away (you see those boats?), our shorelines are made pristine, our vision in the waters of baptism are clear again.

And friends, that brings us to our 3rd remembering reality. At the heart of our Christian identity, we are servants. Acknowledging what

life is like as sinners, celebrating our sainthood as God makes us clean in the midst of the pollution, we are equipped and sent by God to serve. Scripture is abundantly clear on this. Micah of the Old Testament. What is required of you? Do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with your God. So much of Jesus' teaching explains that God asks for us to show him devotion by serving our neighbors: to wash their feet as Jesus has washed ours, that taking care of the least in our midst is the way we take care of Jesus. St Paul in Romans 13: the one who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. We remember that life happens when we're serving, as we're designed by the Spirit to do.

And friends, that is one Epiphany hallmark I'll always treasure—your passion for serving. Serving through hosting blood-drives and pancake breakfasts supporting area shelters. Serving with Interfaith Hospitality Network as you cook, offer hospitality and child care to homeless families who come to stay with us several times a year. Serving as you've hosted refugee families in the past, and prepare to do so again with some African families new to America. Serving through Storybook Project as you go to prison to help incarcerated parents record themselves reading books so their children can keep connected and listen to them reading a bedtime story. Serving as we raise money for and take mission trips for the needs orphans in Uganda, not to mention needs in Tanzania, Kazakstan, India, New Orleans, and the list goes on. Building over 10 Habitat homes. Running one of the most dynamic food and clothing pantries in the Greater Dayton area. Preparing meals at St Paul's Lutheran for those in the inner city. Serving with your creativity—that is, inviting your neighbor to rub shoulders with a faith community through summer musicals, sports and recreation programs, drama camps, support groups and small groups, blessings of the animals, community-wide Be the Church weekends. The list goes on and on. Epiphany, let's always remember how we get to be servants for Jesus in the midst of those he loves.

Finally, today, let's remember our role as soldiers. Last month, Luke and I spent some time making our way through the DVD series, Band of Brothers. It's the tale of Easy company 506th Regiment of the 101st Airborne Division from their initial training starting in 1942 to the end of World War II. They parachuted behind enemy lines in the early

hours of D-Day in support of the landings at Utah beach in Operation Overlord, participated in the liberation of Carentan, France and again parachuted into action during Operation Market Garden in Holland. They were surrounded in the Ardennes Forest in Holland during the Battle of the Bulge before moving on to liberate a concentration camp. Toward the end of the war, they were the first to enter Hitler's mountain retreat in Berchtesgarden, Germany.

Easy company, as they moved throughout all of Europe, illustrated that a soldier's role is to go to where the mission is. For Easy company, it wasn't easy all the time to leave one area they had fought so hard to capture, only to move on to another. For the Wiese family, too, this has been such a hard decision leave such a wonderful spot like Epiphany and step into an unknown future. For LuAnne the teacher to leave a continuing contract into a world of teacher reductions. For the kids to leave the security of good friends and creative activities. If life's calling is about comfort, the evidence says we need to stay. But if faith is about contributing to God's kingdom as deeply as possible, it's probably time to venture forth. All of us are soldiers under the command of Christ. And we need to be pliable, flexible, ready to serve as the Savior's strategy continues to unfold.

Friends, let's wrap up with a final word of remembrance from our first lesson. (Actually use water to pour into vase and have it overflow) Whoever, and wherever we are in life, it will involve suffering. Paul says remember this: 5.3 "We boast in our sufferings, (what's your suffering today? Fear of unknown, physical challenge, stress of transition, suffering of loss in relationship?)

- *remember, with Jesus, suffering produces endurance,
- * remember, with Jesus, endurance produces character,
- * remember, with Jesus, character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us."

So friends, remember, your sinners and saints, servants and soldiers and through it all, your people who can be FULL of God's love, poured into your hearts through the Holy Spirit. In Jesus' name. Amen.