

The story in our Old Testament Lesson is about David, holed up in a cave near his hometown of Bethlehem. David is fighting the Philistines who occupy Bethlehem.

He remembers the well by the gate in Bethlehem, the well from which he drank as a boy after playing games all day; the well from which he was refreshed after a long night of watching his sheep.

He begins to think out loud – how wonderful it would be to have a drink of that water: “Oh, that someone would give me water to drink from that well.”

It was all he said, but it was enough. He did not even notice when, in the stillness of the night, three of his most valued soldiers slipped out from the cave.

They gathered their weapons and they were gone: On their way through enemy lines, sneaking past the Philistine sentries, on their way to the well at the gate in Bethlehem.

David had said he would love to have some water from that well, and whatever their beloved king wanted, they would get it for him.

When they returned with the water, it had to be a moment of great emotion for David – for he instantly realized that their gift, at risk of their lives, was gift worthy only of God, not for a mere man like himself.

He says, “Far be it from me, O Lord, that I should do this. Shall I drink the blood of these men who went at the risk of their lives?”

So he pours the water on the ground as an offering to God.

On this Memorial Day, we have to, in the context of this Old Testament story, think about our heroes: Where do we find them?

Our first thoughts might pull up pictures of Guadalcanal, D-Day; Pork Chop Hill in Korea or the Tet offensive in Viet Nam, Iraq and Afghanistan, the Navy Seals who killed Bin Laden – all these wars and all those soldiers who died.

Some of you have places in your heart for a special someone who died in the line of duty.

Alden Solovy, in his poem **Remember My Heart**, writes on their behalf:

*When you see a flower bloom
Between the cracks in stone,
Remember me.
Remember my heart and my hands.
The hands of sons and daughters,
Of dreamers and doers,
Soldiers by necessity,
Civilians targeted for terror,
Old hands, young hands, children's hands,
Hands that yearned for life.
When you see a flower bloom
Between the cracks in stone...
Remember what cannot be stolen,
Our love, our hope,
Our history, our home...
When you see a flower bloom
Between the cracks in stone,
Remember me.
Remember that beauty survives,
That our love is strong,
That our sacrifices are holy,
That our cause is just,
That our people will endure...
May the Holy One
Shelter your heart in the wings of comfort
And bring peace, at last,
Peace at last.*

The Prince of Peace himself said it, ‘to lay down one’s life for another is the greatest sacrifice of love.’

Just this past Friday, three men in Portland, Oregon sought to protect two young women being threatened with anti-Muslim rants by Jeremy Christian, a white supremacist.

Bravery cost the lives of Taliesin Meche, recently graduated from college, and Rick Best, husband and father of four; and Micah Fletcher, age 21, was injured and is expected to survive.

They looked beyond their own needs that night and did whatever was needed to protect those around them.

Those we remember as heroes are different in so many ways, but heroes have two things in common: compassion and courage.

Sounds a lot like Jesus, doesn't it? His heart was also filled with compassion and courage, which enabled him to be brave in the face of great danger.

Jesus did not deserve to die, either. He had done nothing wrong. To the contrary, he had done a lot of things right.

He spent his life, especially his public ministry, trying to protect the most vulnerable around him from those who exploited them and made their lives difficult. He exposed the hypocrisy of selfish and corrupt leaders, spoke truth to power and challenged all leaders, religious and secular, to use their influence to make life better for everyone, not just a chosen few.

When necessary, he didn't mince words and he was certainly not timid. He called the Pharisees a brood of vipers and overturned the tables of the money changers when he entered the temple during Passover. His pursuit of justice and peace brought him everything but peace. In the end, it cost him his life.

Listen again to Paul's words:

For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person – though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.

Did you pick up on what was so unusual about Jesus' death?

He died to save those who were enemies of God – the ungodly, sinners.

The way Paul puts it, someone might be willing to give up his or her life for a noble cause, but to die on behalf of an evil person – inconceivable.

But here it is, the gospel of Jesus Christ dying on behalf of sinners, and it was such a sacrifice, that here we are still talking about it – but why did Jesus do it?

Why didn't he leave Jerusalem that fateful week when he realized his life was in danger? Why didn't he run into the night when the soldiers came for him in the Garden of Gethsemane?

He didn't run for the same reason these three young men did not abandon their loved ones in that theater. His heart was filled with compassion and courage, which always bring the best out in a person.

Paul answers that question, saying, "God demonstrates his love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

Jesus died in order to save the very people who were crucifying him. God gave his only son to die, not because God didn't love him, but because God loved us so much.

The greatest sacrifice: an innocent man died to save the whole world, friend and foe alike.

Which brings us back to this weekend: the heroic dimension of so many people, as I have seen in so many places as a pastor -

It takes courage to face the challenges of life - It takes courage to live and cope right where you are, with all that life brings you: courage to get married and stay married; courage to be a single parent; courage to face up to the bullies in school or say 'no' to friends when you know it's not right.

I think of those who are willing to speak up for those who have no voice - the poor, the children, those who are vulnerable and have so little when so many have more than enough.

Emily Sargent wrote:

*Courage is quietness – Not martial music made;
Born of facing up to life - Even when afraid.*

In other words, heroes don't always make the headlines, get interviewed on TV, or have streets named after them.

Anyone in that cave with David could have gone out that night – everyone had the opportunity to find a way past the enemy lines to get water for the King – but only three did.

You may be standing on Holy Ground in the presence of unknown, unseen heroes, and you don't even know it.

You may be standing by a hero in the checkout line at the grocery store – working two, three jobs to put food on the table; you may be standing by a hero in the elevator at the hospital, someone giving hope and comfort to a grieving family – these people are never in the news, but these are the people who keep the commitment of godliness and bring the water of refreshing life.

A hero may be sitting next to you in the classroom, or in the cubicle down the hall, or in the car next to you stopped at the red light – there they are – unknown, unnamed, heroes...

Resisting the promiscuous climate of the day, standing courageously against the tempting lifestyles around us, trying to do the right thing.

Maybe you haven't heard of Chris Parker or Stephen Jones. Both are homeless; Parker was panhandling outside the Manchester Arena when the bomb exploded, and Jones had found a place to sleep nearby.

The force of the blast knocked Chris Parker to the floor and woke Stephen Jones. Rather than running for safety, they went to the aid of victims.

Mr. Parker told about comforting a girl who had been seriously injured, wrapping her in a T-shirt, and cradling a dying woman in his arms.

Mr. Jones says he did what he could to help those children who had been hurt.

“Just because I am homeless doesn't mean I haven't got a heart, or I'm not human still,” he told ITV News. “I'd like to think someone would come and help me if I needed the help,” he said.”

Jones said he did what anyone else would have done.

You would like to think so, wouldn't you?

Mariah Carey, several years ago, had a hit song, with the one-word title, “Heroes.” She wrote the song:

*Lord knows
Dreams are hard to follow
But don't let anyone
Tear them away.*

*There will be tomorrow
In time
You'll find the way.*

*And then a hero comes along
With the strength to carry on
And you cast your fears aside
And you know you can survive.*

*So when you feel like hope is gone
Look inside you and be strong
And you'll finally see the truth
That a hero lies in you.*

When compassion and courage combine, they are powerful. Compassion without courage can be intimidated and silenced. Courage without compassion can be self-absorbed and violent. Together, however, they turn people from all walks of life into heroes.

On this Memorial Day Sunday as you remember heroes past and present, think about where our heroes are, and consider the hero inside of you.

The people of Jesus Christ have a chance to witness to the heroic dimension of life, because we know where the water of life is... we know who needs it... let us be willing to get up and go get it, to sacrifice as the sacrifice has been made for us.

TO GOD BE THE GLORY.