

Spiritual Veterans
2 Timothy 2:1-7
Twenty-fifth Sunday after Pentecost
Veterans Recognition Sunday
November 11, 2018
Pastor Dea Sharp, Pikes Peak UMC

2 Timothy 2:1-7 (NRSV) A Good Soldier of Christ Jesus

2 You then, my child, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus; **2** and what you have heard from me through many witnesses entrust to faithful people who will be able to teach others as well. **3** Share in suffering like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. **4** No one serving in the army gets entangled in everyday affairs; the soldier's aim is to please the enlisting officer. **5** And in the case of an athlete, no one is crowned without competing according to the rules. **6** It is the farmer who does the work who ought to have the first share of the crops. **7** Think over what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in all things.

Today is Veteran's Day.

Do you know why Veteran's Day is always on the 11th and not a floating holiday? It's because WWI ended on the 11th day of the 11th month, at the 11th hour when the armistice was signed to end the war.

I remember, as a kid, walking into Spud's Super Valu this time of year, and being met by (mostly) ladies holding a cottage cheese container with a slit in the lid in one hand and a "bouquet" of red, paper poppies in the other. They were collecting change in those containers for the VFW. In return, we were given a poppy that we wound into our button holes.

I remember one time, an older guy shared some important details with my brother and me. Interestingly, I recently read a Facebook post that was just about the same of my experience.

A man asked a lady if he could re-position her poppy and while he was doing that he shared something even more valuable: First, he told her that she should wear the poppy on the right side.

~ And that the poppy's red color represents the blood of all those who gave their lives.

~ The black "eye" of the poppy represents the mourning of those whose loved one didn't return from the battle.

~ And the green leaf is for the grass and crops growing and for the future prosperity after war had destroyed so much.

Finally, the man told her that the leaf should be positioned at 11 o'clock to remind everyone of the 11th hour, 11th day, and 11th month when the war had ended.

That's good information, especially for younger generations to remember – especially as his generation wasn't going to be around much longer.

Today, is the 100th anniversary of that armistice, we honor all veterans, those who are saints in heaven and those still in uniform and all of you in between.

And while we're doing that, let's explore what is required for ALL of us to become true veterans of the cross of Jesus Christ.

Do you notice, (ever) that we have two flags at the front of our sanctuary?

In one corner is the American Flag and across the way is the Christian Flag.

We've actually got a pledge for each one, too.

One represents our country and the other one represents our Lord and Savior and His Kingdom.

When we think about being in service to either of these flags (and the kingdoms they represent) faithfully and effectively, we have to touch on a couple of the requirements it takes to do that.

Webster's dictionary gives the definition of "veteran" as someone who has given long service or has had a lot of experience at an occupation...like being a veteran of the police force, or someone who's served in the military.

But, I think we can all agree, that before we're veterans, we first have to be a good soldiers.

How can we be a good soldier and a true veteran of the Lord?

Well, one way is to VOLUNTEER to serve either flag and kingdom.

In the U.S. we don't have a draft right now, praise God, but I remember, when my brother turned 18 and had to go register at the post office. I was so upset for him.

(Not to mention that I, as a female, older than Dennis, too, wasn't required to do the same thing. Guess I've been a feminist longer than I remembered.)

So we don't have the draft.

Our military is filled with men AND women who have volunteered to serve our country. That's why there are recruiting officers who are sent out to encourage people to enter a branch of our military.

The same is true of the service to God.

God doesn't force anyone to come and serve in the Kingdom.

I DO believe that God *yearns for us to volunteer* – especially to come to freely offered salvation through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

And, God could use MORE OF US to be dedicated “recruiting officers” to urge others to serve under the Christian flag of God's army.

Scripture tells us in Jeremiah

“I have sent my servants the prophets to you again and again to tell you not to do the things I hate.” And in 2 Corinthians, *“Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us...”*

When we serve THAT flag [point to American flag] no matter what our political bent, we have some faith that the government will supply some of our needs. There ARE good things that Uncle Sam provides!

And when we serve what is represented by THIS flag [point to Christian] we also have faith in the One who has called us into His service...and that HE will supply our needs.

Remember, we're the ones who worry that our needs won't be filled – but that's OUR problem...not that God can't or won't!

Remember, from Matthew:

“Therefore, I tell you (Jesus said) do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear....for your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”

When it comes to faith, under God, the Lord wants us to be **true veterans** with long service and practice.

Here's another way to look at this:

As someone joins the military, when we serve the American flag, we're expected to be completely committed to the country and let NOTHING prevent us from performing our duties and serving faithfully.

Jay, in his uniform, can attest to that, all our vets can, when you said:

I, (fill in your name) do solemnly swear that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; that I will obey the orders of the President of the United States and officers appointed over me in accordance with the Uniform Code of Military Justice and regulations, so help me God.

I'm not sure – are YOU ever released from that oath?

So, when we serve the Christian flag, and “for which it stands” we, too are expected to be completely committed to Christ and the Kingdom of God. In God's “army” we are expected to serve God faithfully and not let anything – ANYTHING keep us from doing God's will.

Jesus' disciples and followers knew how difficult that IS.

WE KNOW how difficult that IS!

'Cause our commitment requires discipline.

Right Veterans?

Right Jay?

As we're getting ready for our Charge Conference – Ann and I will be contacting many of you, asking you to make a commitment to PPUMC, to come along with us in leadership of the “business” part of our ministry here.

Don't be scared. – Yes, we're recruiting, but here's a funny story:

A while back, “Sir John” was conducting an orchestra in England to a “standing room only” audience in a concert hall was used for cultural events during the week and a church service on Sunday.

One Saturday night, one of the members of the audience noticed that there was a preacher in the crowd. He leaned over to the pastor and said, sarcastically, “When are YOU going to fill this hall to “standing room only?”

*The preacher looked back at the snarky guy and said, steadily, “I’ll fill this hall on Sunday mornings when you give me – as you’ve given the Conductor tonight – 85 disciplined people to **be** with me and to **work with** me.”*

Yikes – maybe I’m the snarky one! Ha!

Back to our flags:

When we serve the American flag, we’re required to follow orders. Yes?

We’re expected to be obedient to the letter.

Well, when we serve God – we’re expected of NO LESS.

Jesus said

“Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. They will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them.”

The man that wrote “Amazing Grace” (John Newton) also wrote once:

“If two angels in heaven were given assignments by God at the same time, one of them to go and rule over the greatest nation on earth and the other to go sweep the streets of the dirtiest village, each angel would be completely indifferent as to which one got which assignment. It simply wouldn’t matter to them. Why? Because the real joy,” Newton said, “lies in being obedient to God.”

Dear Ones, as Christ Followers, it *ISN’T* what God has us doing; the important thing is that WE ARE DOING what God wants us to do!

Here's a poem to get us through to the end of this message:

*One day I looked at myself—at the self that Christ can see;
I saw the person I am today and the one I ought to be.
I saw how little I really pray and how little I really do;
I saw the influence of my life—how little of it was true!
I saw the bundle of faults and fears I ought to lay on the shelf;
I had given a little bit to God, but I hadn't given myself!
I came from seeing myself, with my mind made up to be—
The sort of person that Christ can use, with a heart He may always see.*

Veteran's Day is a great day to take a look at ourselves as *true spiritual veterans*; long in service, completely devoted to the Kingdom of God, and serving in the example of Jesus Christ. I pray that we'll ALL consider, in our hearts, taking our own oath to be good soldiers of the Cross; to be Spiritual Veterans – bearing “true faith and allegiance” “obeying the orders of our Spiritual Commander in Chief.”

So help us God!
Amen!