

Love & Commitment
Preacher: Rev. Lauren Lorincz
Date: May 29, 2016

"Love & Commitment" Pilgrim Church UCC, Ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time, (Luke 7:1-10) May 29, 2016

Memorial Day

-Originally Decoration Day (decorating graves with flowers, wreaths, and flags)—day to remember those who had died in service to our country. Widely observed in 1868 to commemorate Civil War soldiers—former Union General James Garfield made a speech at Arlington National Cemetery. Participants helped decorate the graves of more than 20,000 Union and Confederate soldiers buried in Arlington.[1]

-Another origin story: Memorial Day began by former slaves on May 1, 1865 in Charleston, SC —honored 257 Union Soldiers buried in a mass grave in a Confederate prison camp. The former slaves dug up the bodies and worked for 2 weeks to provide a proper burial in gratitude for them fighting for freedom. Held a parade after the work was done—marched, sang, and celebrated.[2]

-Honoring those lost shows forth love and commitment we can have in community.

The Centurion, The Slave, The Jewish Elders, and Jesus

-Deep levels of love and commitment in community found in Luke 7. The Centurion for his slave, the Centurion for the Jewish Elders, the Jewish Elders for the Centurion, Jesus for everyone.

-Slavery widely practiced in the ancient world, many slaves were prisoners of war. Though we see someone in a position of power use his voice to advocate for one who had no voice (dying slave).

-The elders even speak on the Centurion's behalf to Jesus, with the Centurion believing that since he is a Gentile he wasn't worthy to approach a great Jewish teacher like Jesus. Questions of power here.

-“He is worthy of having you do this for him, for he loves our people, and it is he who build our synagogue for us.” (Luke 7:4-5)

-Love of people prioritized, even over being their benefactor—the Roman soldier and the Jewish community are bonded by love and commitment.

-William Sloane Coffin: “It is not because we have value that we are loved, but because we are loved that we have value. Our value is a gift, not an achievement . . . because our value is a gift, we don't have to prove ourselves, only to express ourselves.”

-We are loved and therefore valuable! We see the value of every person in this story, whether they are slave or free, Jew or Gentile, Roman Centurion or Jewish Elder—Jesus sees them with God's eyes.

What bonds communities—love and commitment

-Christian communities are bonded together by love and commitment, faith is communal, can't practice Christianity in isolation—we are part of “communities of faith”.

-In ancient Christianity, the desert fathers and mothers went out into the deserts of Egypt to live in caves and practice their Christianity in isolation from society. An amazing thing began to happen with the most well-known Desert Father, Anthony the Great. People began to flock to live near him, to learn from him, and practice Christianity with him—monasteries in the desert were born.

-Anthony's isolated desert existence became a community of Christians!

-Christianity is a lived faith, we rely on commitment and love of one another to be who we are in the world.

-That's what we see when those former slaves came together to rebury and honor Union Soldiers in SC, and both Union and Confederate soldiers were honored in Arlington on Decoration Day.

-That's what we see when the lines that separated people in Jesus' time (slave, free, Jew, Gentile, Roman Centurion, Jewish Elder) were crossed because love and commitment won out the day.

-Love and commitment to one another and to God bind us together across differences, may it be so with us!

[1] “The History of Memorial Day,” PBS, <http://www.pbs.org/national-memorial-day-concert/memorial-day/history/>

[2] “Memorial Day,” Snopes, <http://www.snopes.com/military/memorialday.asp>