

Veteran's Day Sermon – November 9, 2014

by Rodney Hine

Good morning. This lectern has exposed many great people over the history of this church. Today I want to continue that legacy and spotlight a great fraternity and sorority of veteran service people. Currently, there are more than 22 million Veterans, 2 million of those women, who have served in the United States Armed Forces that have reintegrated back into our society.

According to the Department of Veteran's Affairs, the history of Veterans Day began with Raymond Weeks, who organized a Veterans Day parade for Birmingham, Alabama on November 11, 1947, to honor all American Veterans for their loyal service. Originally, November 11th was Armistice Day. However, that holiday honored only veterans of World War I. In 1954, President, and former General, Dwight D. Eisenhower signed a bill proclaiming November 11th as Veterans Day and called upon Americans everywhere to rededicate themselves to the cause of peace. He issued a Presidential Order directing the head of the Veterans Administration, now the Department of Veterans Affairs, to form a Veterans Day National Committee to organize and oversee the national observance of Veterans Day.

The Veterans Day National Ceremony is held each year on November 11th at Arlington National Cemetery. At 11 a.m., a color guard, made up of members from each of the military services, renders honors to America's war dead during a tradition-rich ceremony at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.

The President or his representative places a wreath at the Tomb and a bugler sounds "Taps." The balance of the ceremony, including a "Parade of Flags" by numerous Veterans service organizations, takes place inside the Memorial Amphitheater, adjacent to the Tomb.

Veterans Day is intended to thank and honor all those who served honorably in the military - in wartime or peacetime. In fact, Veterans Day is largely intended to thank living Veterans for their service, to acknowledge that their contributions to our national security are appreciated, and to underscore the fact that all those who served - not only those who died - have sacrificed and done their duty.

I am not a military veteran; I am the son of a veteran. I have a deep respect and admiration for veterans. My adoration for military service people and veterans initially sources by the selfless act required when enlisted or drafted into service. One relinquishes some of their personal freedoms. Duty is the number one obligation above family, personal health, and in some cases one's life. This sacrifice to defend our families, country and its constitution is amazingly selfless. I am in awe of the men and women who take this challenge.

One freedom that is lost with service is a soldier's opportunity to make decisions freely for him or herself. Senior ranking officers dictate to their subordinates their actions; whether the

subordinates agree with the orders or not. Our servicemen and women follow orders that originate from the Commander in Chief, on down the line. There was an unfortunate time in our country's history where some of our countrymen judged our returning servicemen inappropriately. The politics of our nation's leaders are where our grievances should fall, not with the veteran. On reflection, that embarrassing time in our history was important - it provided our nation with the opportunity to understand how disdain towards returning veterans is unjustified, and that this conduct should never happen again. Regardless of our own political belief, our military deserves the respect and gratitude for their selfless contribution to serving our country.

I asked a few veterans what they would like to hear someone speak about concerning veterans and Veteran's Day. One veteran wished it to be known that he is one of you, one of us all. Upon returning from Vietnam, a welcoming environment did not greet him. Despite that, he returned to civilian life and continues to be a contributing and productive member of our society. Interestingly, he is the norm of returning veterans. If we could apply social norming concepts here, we could understand that the majority of returning veterans integrate back into civilian life seamlessly. It is only the sensational stories that make the evening news hour that sway our perception: falsely making the minority into the new majority. This false perception makes it difficult for society to see the veterans as fellow Americans. These returning veterans are valuable resources and in no way "damaged goods" as some have described how they are perceived.

Another awareness needing to be championed is not only the support of the soldier in combat but the support necessary for the spouse and family stateside. When we think or recall what is involved in covering the household and parenting duties alone we can easily see where needs lie. We can ease some of the double duty of the stateside parent and reduce the worry of the world-wide soldier by helping out with these daily challenges.

Our service people have a focused understanding of patriotism and feel honored to have served their country. They have answered what they can do for their country and have done it with honor and pride. Without veterans asking, can we as a country do more to support and honor our veterans?

President Kennedy's closing of his inaugural speech summarizes all our roles as free thinking, patriotic Americans. His closing remarks were:

"In the long history of the world, only a few generations have been granted the role of defending freedom in its hour of maximum danger. I do not shrink from this responsibility--I welcome it. I do not believe that any of us would exchange places with any other people or any other generation. The energy, the faith, the devotion which we bring to this endeavor will light our country and all who serve it--and the glow from that fire can truly light the world.

And so, my fellow Americans: ask not what your country can do for you--ask what you can do for your country.

My fellow citizens of the world: ask not what America will do for you, but what together we can do for the freedom of man.

Finally, whether you are citizens of America or citizens of the world, ask of us here the same high standards of strength and sacrifice which we ask of you. With a good conscience our only sure reward, with history the final judge of our deeds, let us go forth to lead the land we love, asking His blessing and His help, but knowing that here on earth God's work must truly be our own."