



One Against the World

Text: John 17:11
O.T.: Psalm 68:1-10
N.T.: John 17:1-19

There are times when Christians stood as one against the world. Times of yester year when Christ's Church was not fragmented by political divisions from civil government. Times of another era when Christians were not of a divided mind about who was the enemy of Christ's Kingdom.

Memorial Day is a time of remembering – a time of honoring ancestors from the past who gave us an inheritance we did not earn with sacrifices we've never made.

The most recent of these ancestors we have laid to rest and will respect our indebtedness to what they gave to us in faith, hope, and love. But in the modern world of remembering the past, memory is highly individualized. It's about my parents, my family, my relatives.

It's a memory of your home, a grandparents' home, of events from your past, not so much our past. If it is a memory of our past, its a national past, a national event, national figures.

Memory this weekend is rarely if ever given to our ancestors of faith in Jesus Christ who stood as one against the world. Memorial Day isn't given to the saints of our Christian mission who bravely travelled to foreign lands, taught the Gospel when faced with martyrdom, accepted pain and suffering of disease, famine, and government opposition to Jesus Christ's Gospel.

Memorial Day's memory is selective. It's a matter of choice.



Each day Christians make choices. Many choices are about our use of time. We make choices about where we go. We make choices about what we do. We make choices about those we meet.

We also make choices about ethics and values. We choose how to respond to challenges we face. We choose whether to return evil for evil. We base our responses on values that are deeply embedded in our lives. They are products of your community's faith in God, neighborhood values where we were raised, the school we attended, the wider culture to which we were exposed by media.

These choices are the intersection of our lives with the world.

The choice of a selective memory that is exceptionally personal comes from the atomization of community in our culture. The bedrock foundational principle that lies behind these choices is "I am all that matters. What gives me satisfaction, what gives me happiness is what I remember."

The community of faith's contribution to personal development is overwhelmed by the surrounding culture that prioritizes individual autonomy from others who helped us become who we are.

Years ago, a social psychologist conducted a study on the campus of Princeton Seminary. A student was randomly chosen by study researchers to lie on the sidewalk outside the Seminary's chapel in the middle of morning classes. The student was to be totally inert.

The Seminary population passed by this student that day. Not one future pastor stopped to see if something was wrong with the student lying on the sidewalk.



Princeton's seminarians' response mirrored the response of bystanders on a street while a person is being mugged. It's no different from city walkers ignoring a homeless person on a street corner.

Each person in our life contributes to who we are, including those who lie helpless before us. Their relationship to us forms who we are, and how we live. But even those we see in front of us, given to us by God to test our faith, are not of concern to too many of us. Consider, then, those who came from other eras whose lives of faith, and sacrifice of life in Jesus' name, gave us what we are today.

Choices - Choices to be of a world that exists to satisfy me, or to live in the world but not be of the world of self-satisfaction.

Christians live in the world of the here and now. But the here and now exists because of who Christians were before us. Jesus did not pray for His Father to remove us from this world. He prayed we would be protected while we live in the world so we would be one as a community of faith in Him, as Christ is one with the Father.

Jesus did not pray for Christians to be insulated from the world. He prayed that Christians as a group would act inside the world fully conscious of what it stood for - choosing to stand as one for God. He did not pray for us to ignore what is happening in front of us, or, to act as if the world doesn't exist because all that matters is what is important for me.

Jesus prayed that we would stand as one to address those situations that are afflicting people around us with the message of hope in Jesus Christ.



This Memorial Day, God is calling us to remember times when Christians stood as one with the Gospel of Jesus Christ against the world. These are people forgotten to much of the Church.

There is the memory of the Bishop of Speir and his church members who petitioned Christian leaders to spare Jewish families in the Rhine during the First Crusade. There is the memory of the Roman Emperor Constantine whose Edict of Milan established an empire of religious toleration, where people of all religions were protected by civil law to worship God.

There is the memory of the Women's Christian Temperance Union who called for an end to the culture of intoxication that was abusive of women and children. There is the memory of the Abolitionist Movement that carried on the Church's position from the time of Jesus against human trafficking.

There is the memory of the Westminster Divines who envisioned a culture where God alone is Lord of the conscience, not a secular state, no matter how well intentioned it may be. There is the memory of Raymond de Sauvetat, Bishop of Toledo. He brought together medieval linguists from Christianity, Judaism, and Islam to translate Aristotle's writings into Latin.

This forgotten contribution to world intellectual progress by the Church began scientific discovery that we are praying today will protect us from COVID-19. The community of faith in Jesus Christ was a life-sustaining force in the world before our governor's declaration.



There is the memory of the Archbishop of Canterbury, Stephen Langton, who authored the *Magna Carta* on behalf of England's barons to limit the power of monarchs. He opposed King John I of England's tyranny by using Biblical scholarship to separate Church from state, and to uplift religious freedom. His generation of Christians laid the foundation for freedom in the modern world.

There is the memory of the Church's rejection of infanticide, sexual bondage, and human sacrifice that proliferated in the Roman Empire and Ancient Greece. The Church was the life-sustaining community who protected children, women, and all people from sacrificial rituals of paganism. The Church declared Christ's message of women's equality and children's dignity with monogamy in marriage and chastity in single life as its crowning jewels of ethical achievement.

These are but a sampling of when the Body of Christ stood as one in previous times. Those congregations and their leaders were more than sanctuaries from the world. Those congregations bravely united around Christ's teaching to stand as one before social and political opposition with Christ's message of hope through social transformation.

Those congregations did not ignore or avoid the world in which they worshipped Jesus Christ. They were engaged in current issues of spirituality and justice in the world. Church members left their places of worship concerned to offer Christ's healing love within their broken communities as Christ's witnesses.



They did not blend into the world after leaving their Christian faith in the sanctuary where they worshiped. The choices they made, the life of charity, morality, purity, and honesty separated them from the world around them.

They stood as one in Rome's Coliseum, concentration camps of World War II, and Greyfriar's Church courtyard in Edinburgh. They marched as one in Selma, Alabama united by the conviction that Jesus Christ is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. He intends for all people to live the abundant life with dignity and respect.

These great visionaries of Christ united the Saints to inspire ordinary people to be the Church triumphant.

Christ had such a Church in mind when He prayed for His followers. He envisioned the Church as One against the World. Today only a few congregations remember His vision in this world of radical individualism. They are so consumed by who Christ is and what He has taught them that they can live no other way.

The congregation that is One against the World intentionally interacts with the world about it. Church members are united to create opportunities to bring Christ's message of salvation to the world.

These congregations are not intimidated by challenges they face if people in their neighborhoods become excited to join them.

These congregations don't stimulate interest without Christ's substance. They show spiritual maturity while living in the world without fear.



These congregations are secure living inside the boundaries of discipleship Christ teaches. They welcome others to be transformed by Christ and discover new life as members of Christ's church.

These congregations are united by agreement among church members about Christ's terms of discipleship, and how a prospective Christian enters life with Christ inside the boundaries of His teaching. From the oldest to the youngest church member, each can explain to another how to become one with Christ.

These congregations are filled with mature mentors of faith who are excited to share their journey with Christ with a novice in the faith.

These congregations are like the Church in Acts that were not conformed to the world.

They remember where they came from, how they got here, and what their responsibility is for the salvation of the world.

They are apostolic congregations – congregations that live like the apostles lived so long ago who stood as one against the world.

May their memory inspire us this Memorial Day to great outreach in the name of Jesus Christ!

Amen.