

Good Morning Church,

Do you know what today is and what tomorrow is? Hint: I am wearing red – that is your hint for both days. Red like a poppy flower and red like fire. Yes, Memorial Day and Pentecost - and that is where my problem began. Did you ever say yes to something and think, oh what was I thinking?? Well, that is what happened to me. Pastor Joe expected me to preach this last Sunday in May, but I was not thinking it was Memorial Day and Pentecost. How can I possibly do them both justice because neither should be ignored? Let's try.

The red poppy pin with the words *Lest We Forget* that the greeters handed out is a reminder of Memorial Day, the day when we remember the brave men and women who made the ultimate sacrifice for our country. But many have forgotten. They just think about the beach and barbecues. I heard a newscaster say yesterday, the weather is going to be great as we kick off summer. I guess things have changed so much over the years that many people do not know or understand the history. I say that because there is a website called [thetruemeaning.org](http://thetruemeaning.org) dedicated to explaining what Memorial Day is and why it is important. I am summarizing from their site: Years of happy prosperity, followed by fewer conflicts or wars of short duration, has combined to overlook this holiday – this day of remembrance. There is also a bit of guilt with the way we treated our Vietnam vets – spitting on them, etc., so now many think this is the same as Veterans Day – a day to say Happy Memorial Day. It is **not**, it is a day to give thanks for those who laid down their lives and to think of the Gold Star families who lost their children, siblings, or parents. And of course, corporate America morphs every possible occasion into an opportunity to have a One Day Sale rather than stores being closed with signs to commemorate those who sacrificed their lives and heaven forbid put up a sign that reads; "Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends". *John 15:13*

All of this has turned into one big, long weekend without a thought as to why this is a holiday – who **paid** for this holiday. But there are still some veterans who remember those they served with who never returned home. There are those of us whose parents educated them on the meaning of Memorial Day and we must do the same because we have a responsibility to speak up and begin the effort to re-educate others about a day that is much too important to overlook. So why don't we? Many of us wind up torn between speaking up or overlooking wrong-doing. Doing the right thing is rarely enjoyable or easy, but we must show pride – we must explain and we must show our pride as we put out hands over our hearts when the nation anthem plays, as one soldier writes: "I was taught in Army Warrant Officer Candidate School, when one walks past a wrong — one is equally wrong." Setting the record straight is an unwelcome chore, as is spending all weekend staunchly defending the day that our government has set aside to honor our fallen, but preserving **The True Meaning of Memorial Day is our duty**". Wear that poppy pin proudly and explain its meaning to everyone.

Today is Pentecost: According to Jewish teaching, Pentecost was the day the Torah was given, the day that God gave birth to the Hebrew nation by speaking the divine covenant to them at Mt. Sinai. Pentecost was the nickname (Πεντηκοστής) which comes from the Greek word for 50- Πενήντα. In the Old Testament, it was the Feast of Weeks or Shavuot in Hebrew (which means weeks) because it was 7 weeks and one day after Passover). In Leviticus 23:16 it says, <sup>16</sup>“You shall count until the day after the seventh Sabbath, fifty days; then you shall present an offering of new grain to the Lord”. This was an important holiday and all Jewish males were required to attend this feast in Jerusalem. That is why there were so many diaspora Jews (scattered Jews who resided in other countries) there.

There were 120 Jewish men gathered there, and they were gathered together because it was tradition to study the Torah all through the night until dawn on that day. Now that is a Bible study! Why 120, because that was the number of Jewish men needed to make a legitimate synagogue. As this group was praying and studying, a great roaring sound like that of a mighty windstorm came and filled the house and the flames of fire landed on their tongues. As shocked as they were, they would have recognized the wind and fire as signs from God. The wind is the breath of God, as in Genesis 2:7, <sup>7</sup>“then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground<sup>[a]</sup> and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.” Fire symbolizes God’s purifying presence which burns away the sinful parts of our lives and sets our hearts on fire.

Luke tells us in Acts 2, it was 50 days after Jesus’ resurrection and 10 days after He ascended into heaven when this happened. And it changed **everything**. The disciples became apostles. A *disciple* is a follower or learner, and an *apostle* is a **messenger** or missionary. These men were given a mission – to spread the Good News of Jesus Christ to every people including the Gentiles. That is why we heard all those hard to pronounce places, which would be modern day Iraq, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Egypt, Greece, Libya, Turkey, and Asia Minor. Remember, these were devout Jews, buttoned up people, so when Jesus’ followers ran laughing, crying, and proclaiming the Good News, the others at the Temple asked: “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?”, meaning how are these uneducated men whose native language is Aramaic, speaking our languages? This was the work of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit Jesus promised to send them once he ascended to heaven! That is why Peter recited the prophet Joel’s words: (and I am only sharing part of it)

<sup>17</sup>“In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. <sup>18</sup>Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy.

<sup>21</sup> Then **everyone** who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.’

The last days. This was the end of the Old Covenant and the beginning of the New Covenant brought by the Holy Spirit and now, because of the sacrifice Jesus made, now everyone who believes will be saved. This is why Jesus suffered and died – for us to be saved. Can you even imagine the excitement?

Can you imagine if we suddenly felt that wind and fire – filled with the Holy Spirit?? We all started speaking in different languages so excited we ran out of here running along the Canal proclaiming the Good News!! What would people think?

Now we Methodists especially here on the Cape tend to be a bit buttoned up. In fact, there's a story told about one church – I won't reveal the name. One Pentecost the preacher was preaching so powerfully, one woman jumped up and shouted Hallelujah!! One of the ushers rushed down to her to ask if she was okay. I am fine – I just caught the Spirit. To which the usher replied, "well you certainly didn't catch it here".

I told you I struggled to do Memorial Day and Pentecost justice but then it hit me – Sacrifice, "Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends". *John 15:13* How blessed are we? Brave men and women laid down their lives so we would remain a free people and Jesus laid down His life so we could be a saved people. We can never forget this. Now I am not going to ask all of you to run down to the Canal shouting the Good News BUT do remember your freedom and your salvation is due to great sacrifice. Freedom is not free! Will you stand, give each other the sign of peace and shout Hallelujah?

And God's people say **Amen.**