

Sunday, November 11, 2012
Rev. Diane Monti-Catania

Sermon – “Home of the Free, Land of the Brave”

My father joined the United States Marine Corp when he was just 18 years old.

The summer after graduating from high school he enlisted along with three of his friends.

Four idealistic young men who believed they could make a difference.

They were sent off to training camp and then onto the Korean Conflict.

Four years later, two of them came home and two did not.

My father never talked about the war but he was deeply proud of having been a Marine.

He would talk about honor and discipline, but not about war.

His experiences in the Marine Corp shaped his perception of himself and his attitude toward life.

He was proud of having served his country and he instilled a sense of patriotism in us.

On car trips we would sing the Marine’s Hymn, along with the traditional ‘I been working on the railroad’ and ‘She’ll be coming round the mountain.’”

Once he was discharged, he never put his uniform on again, though it hung in his closet my entire life.

He had a little box of medals that he let us pin on our pajamas as children. He never told us what they were for.

As children we would ask him to tell us about being in the war, but he would always decline.

There are no photographs, no letters. He left it all behind.

The only story he ever told was about the deal he had made with God.

He was in a foxhole, being actively attacked by the enemy.

His buddy, next to him was dead.

He related that he made a deal with God that if he got out of there alive, he would never complain about anything in his life.

He did get out alive and I have never heard him utter a word of complaint in the 55 years I have known him.

From where will my help come? My help comes from the Lord who made heaven and earth.

My father kept those stories of the war locked deep inside until he started to suffer from Alzheimers.

In the early stages of his dementia he talked endlessly about Korea.

He would tell my boys and I story after story about battles he had been in describing the cold at the Chosin Reservoir with intricate detail.

He talked about not having enough food, about interpersonal rivalries among commanders, about uncertainty, about fear.

After years of telling us all of the great things about being a Marine, it was as if he had to come clean with the reality of being in a war.

As we celebrate Veteran's Day today – not a religious holiday – but a secular one, I think it is important to remember that the veterans we celebrate are not only those who stand here among us, who each gave a part of themselves – but also those who did not come home.

Each one of those soldiers, young men and women, gave an ultimate sacrifice, gave their life, so that we could stand in line on Tuesday and vote.

They gave their lives so that we can gather here each week and worship God.

They gave everything because they believed.

They believed in freedom, in liberty, in democracy.

They trusted their leaders and many of them, put their trust in God.

In Marks' gospel Jesus warns about putting our trust in leaders whose authority comes from their position, rather than their values.

He points to the poor woman who contributes from her poverty as an example of someone to emulate.

His point is that we must look beyond the superficial, deep into the souls of our fellow human beings.

We must search for those whose lives are rooted in God.

We must model for others what it means to give everything we have for what we believe.

This past week we concluded one of the most contentious campaigns in our country's history.

We have been subject to months of empty rhetoric, name calling, blaming and petty bickering.

It became difficult to discern from where our help was to come. Despair seemed to be the prevalent feeling throughout the country.

But, just like the widow in our Old Testament Reading today – we carried on.

We did what we had to do and we went to the polls.

117 million people voted – peacefully, without major incident.

Regardless of whom you supported, or what hopes and dreams you had for this election, the fact that 117 million people voted pays tribute to every single veteran this country has ever produced.

We must remember in whom we place our trust.

We put our trust in those soldiers to keep us safe and we put our trust in God.

Oh my friends, we get overwhelmed with talk of fiscal cliffs and global destruction.

When we lament the loss of traditional families and protestant work ethics, the breakdown of communication and the rise of selfishness –we forget the psalmist’s words, *From where will my help come? My help comes from the Lord who made heaven and earth.*

Imagine the widow in our Old Testament story today.

She is toiling, with nothing, no resources, no food and along comes a holy man and tells her drop what she is doing to give him something to eat.

Though she is doubtful, she does as he commands and her household is sustained for many days.

“The jar of meal was not emptied, neither did the jug of oil fail, according to the word of the Lord.”

From where will my help come? My help comes from the Lord who made heaven and earth.

We are God’s people. Abraham’s ancestors. Followers of the *Way*. We do not put our trust in princes or scribes...we put our trust in God.

We celebrate our veterans for their courage – we are the land of the free, home of the brave.

But this is not exclusive to those in the military.

We, too, share in the promise of this great land.

We are the beneficiaries of the millions of soldiers who have defended our freedom – but we are also the carriers of that promise.

It is up to us to go boldly into the future creating a new country, living our values in the most ordinary ways.

When American soldiers go to fight – they are bipartisan.

They go to defend your right to disagree – to disagree respectfully and with regard to the other person’s humanity.

It takes tremendous courage to stand up for what you believe, but it takes even more courage to reach out to those who are different and to listen to their voice.

Jesus forced his disciples to see someone who was most often invisible by drawing attention to the widow and her contribution of two small copper coins.

Today, make a commitment to notice, to think about people in the world whose lives are different than ours.

Think about the young soldier sitting in Afghanistan, listening for approaching footsteps in the dark night; think about the widow with empty jars waiting for a miracle.

As followers of Jesus Christ, our call is to build the kingdom of God right here on Earth.

Let go of the judgments that plagued this campaign – that tear apart our community.

Open your hearts and minds to hear what your neighbor has to say.

Recognize that you may not have all the answers – you might not even know the right questions.

This week, think about how profoundly grateful you are that you live in America.

Honor our veterans by living up to the ideals of our country

Give thanks to God for the fact that we are free.

Free to vote, free to criticize and disagree with one another, free to go boldly into our future knowing that our help will come from the Lord who made heaven and earth.

I like to think that the medals my Father pinned on our pajamas were for courage and honesty and trust – values that he imparted to us as his legacy.

I know From where will my help come? My help comes from the Lord who made heaven and earth.