

"Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."

- John 15:13

Exodus 15:1-22

Revelation 19:11-end

Psalm 144

New Book of Worship, Psalm 8, pp.43,44

This week-end we celebrate Memorial Day. War is accompanied with so much destruction, waste, loss of life, both physical and mental suffering that we are not surprised when we hear some people declaring war to be wrong, all wrong, always wrong, wrong for everybody, wrong even in self defense.

The doctrines of our church teach that in most ancient times people lived in peace, that no one desired more than necessities and so riches were not collected and hoarded. But eventually lust for wealth sprang up. Then men commenced to desire the possessions of others, and the love of accumulated riches and dominion ever grew. Wars then arose, their purpose being to extend dominion and get the property of others.

Who cannot now see that those who started the first world war did so to wrest wealth and territory from other nations? So from one point of view we see clearly that war arises from the love of dominion and lust for riches growing until it bursts all restraints. The beginning of a war is always in evil. But our problem is not so simple. Have we a moral right, by force of arms, to resist and conquer this lust of plunder which, like Lucifer who exemplifies it, would enslave all the world and ascend, if it could, even above the Most High?

On this point the church teaches that, though it is wrong to wage war from the love of gain or conquest, it is one's duty to defend his country from injustice. We can see the truth of this from common reason. What respect could we have for a man who would not protect and defend his family? Who would stand by and see the innocent robbed, beaten, or injured? And the country is more than the individual or family, and all the more are we under obligation to defend the country that protects us. The church is more than the country, and so much the greater is our obligation to protect the church from injury and to secure for every man the liberty to worship after his own conscience.

So our doctrines make the obvious assertion: "Where a person resists the assaults of an enemy, and in his own defense either beats him or commits him to prison for his future security, at the same time retaining such a disposition of mind as to be willing to become his friend; in this case he acts from a principle of charity. So also wars, which have for their end the protection of our country and the church, are not inconsistent with charity" (T.C.R.407).

To persuade us that war is always an evil the Word is quoted: "Unto him that smiteth thee on the one cheek offer also the other." But this is plainly a parable. It is right to go to the Word, but we must have true doctrine to interpret the Word or we will fall into confusion through the mere letter, which "killeth." "If thine eye offend thee, pluck it out." "If thy foot or hand offend, cut it off." We do not pluck out the eye, or cut off the hand or foot. If one takes our cloak, we do not offer him our coat also. To follow these injunctions literally would soon destroy us and deprive us of even the necessities of life, and would encourage evil instead of checking it. To offer the right cheek is to present the cause of right from the standpoint of affection. To turn the other cheek when the right is smitten is to plead from the standpoint of truth and right. To cut off the hand is to stop wrong act. To cut off the foot is to cease walking in the wrong way. We recognize the parable.



In this world, as it is now, it is sometimes necessary to defend ourselves, our possessions, our families, our nation, our church from violence. If it is not, why do we need judges, police, prisons? There are those who preach that if we would do away with police, courts, and judges, if we would abolish all law, the world would right itself. And they would be correct if every man were born an angel and remained so. But we are born natural, and as long as the world endures, this will be true. "Marvel not that I say unto you, Ye must be born again." "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." And because of this society has to be organized so as to suppress the evil doer and maintain justice - justice between individuals and among the nations.

From this standpoint we can look upon our wars as a necessary step in the progress of the world, whereby the world will protect the weaker nations and defend their justice.

This is not to say that universal peace is impossible. We can advance to that state of civil development wherein the great tragedy of war will be eliminated. The Word promises us that the time will come when "nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more." Indeed most of the nations upon the earth have long been ready for a tribunal with power to enforce decrees of universal justice. But if one powerful nation will not act in such concert, but systematically studies to take advantage of the world's love of peace, peace cannot endure. As one thief might accumulate the wealth of the world if he were unrestrained, so, if there were no restraint to the unjust and violent exercise of power, one nation might gain dominion over the world and subject all peoples to base slavery, depriving the nations of the liberty that has been won for them through centuries of war, rivers of blood, and unspeakable suffering. So it is written, "He that killeth with the sword must be killed with the sword."

We know that to prevent such loss of liberty the nations have from time to time risen up. For the cause of universal liberty and justice our own nation has sometimes entered the world struggle. And though families mourn for their dear ones, they would not be worthy of their fathers nor of their country nor of liberty were they not of the stock that would put its life at stake for the salvation of those treasures of human freedom which are dearer than life.

We believe that our armies have gone into the hardships and dangers of war in the spirit thus described in the "Doctrine of Charity" (166): "If he (the common soldier) looks to the Lord, and shuns evils as sins, and does his work sincerely, justly, and faithfully, he also becomes a form of charity... He is averse to unjust depredation; he abominates wrongful effusion of blood. Otherwise, in battle, he is not averse to it, because then he does not think about it, but about the enemy as an enemy, who wants his blood. His fury ceases when he hears the sound of the drum calling his to desist from slaughter. He looks upon his captives after the victory as the neighbor, according to the quality of good. Before battle, he raises his mind to the Lord, and commends his life into His hands. And after he has done this, he lets his mind down from its elevation into the body, and becomes brave; the thought of the Lord, which he is then unconscious of, remaining still in his mind, above his bravery. And then if he dies, he dies in the Lord; if he lives, he lives in the Lord." Thus may our soldiers in every war always fight, and if they are to die, may they die in the Lord.

Defending our possessions, our country, our church is in true correspondence to our defending truth and good in our characters. Life is a battle, because we have to fight against our bad thoughts and desires. It is the Lord working in us from whom we receive inspiration to overcome our unregenerate nature. For this reason it is written:



"The Lord is a man of war." And we are told that He will fight for us: "The Lord of Hosts shall come down to fight for Mount Zion, and for the hill thereof." "The Lord shall go forth and fight." "The Lord shall go forth as a mighty man. He shall stir up zeal like a man of war. He shall cry, yea, roar. He shall prevail against His enemies."

The love of heavenly things in the soul fights against falsity and evil, to save the things of character that are good and true. The spiritual zeal descends into the natural mind, and becomes the fury of battle with those who fight for good principles. But in those who fight for the love of plunder it becomes infernal rage, cruelty, and the lust of destruction. The motive within determines the character of the outward zeal of the warrior, and makes the act either good or evil. Those who enter a war should make their motives as great and high as the precious liberty that they defend, and if it be that they give their lives, then their gift is as noble and sacred, their sacrifice as great as the cause in which they have laid down their lives.

And we are well assured of this, that the Lord's Divine Providence is over the heart-rending calamity of war, and that each one who enters our country's service is in His tender care. And also we know this teaching to be true: that whoever is a good citizen on earth, if his motive is love to the Lord and the neighbor, will make a good citizen in heaven. And we are told that among the most blessed in heaven are to be found many who were common soldiers. It is not the work we do but the spirit of human service, the love of right that we put into service which decides our place. May everyone who enters the service of his country keep, as he would treasure eternal life, the ideal of service to the Lord and service of mankind.

And in our modern times, when interests are so world-wide, how grand and high can be the motive! May our young men enter the service not merely with the love of adventure, with the thought of novelty, of honor, of fame, but only from the love of the cherished principles of Christian faith and truth.

"Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." Surely all who are willing to lay down their lives for our happiness and peace are our friends. And as there is no greater love than that which prompts the laying down of one's life, how deeply we should love and honor those who are willing to offer this great sacrifice, who, from time to time, for the good of those left behind in their comfortable homes, have gone forth to the suffering, desperation, and dangers of war! On this Memorial Day let us recognize that in the spirit, above outward manifestation, are the noble resolves, the holy purposes, sanctified by angels and by the Lord our God that inspired those who over the years have served their country in time of war, and that great is their reward in heaven if in the cause of justice, liberty, and world peace they have laid down their lives in this service.

Amen

To our readers: The following note is not intended for public reading but for your information, since a number of our people here in Bath, impressed with the timely character of the sermons used since my husband passed into the spiritual world, have wanted to know just when he wrote and preached each sermon. From now on I plan to print at the end of each sermon the original date or the word "undated" which will always mean that the sermon was preached in Urbana before he took the Fryeburg Society in September, 1920. This Memorial Day sermon was undated, and was preached not long after the United States entered the First World War.

Anita S. Dole