

November 25, 2020  
Thanksgiving Eve

Grace and Mercy and Peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, Amen. Something that has become very apparent to me over my 60 years of life, and I bet most of you have seen this and felt this happening too; is that words oftentimes lose or change their meaning. Consider for instance, a number of years back, when I was a child, (ok a lot of years back) Bing Crosby singing about Christmas, would talk about the gay, happy feelings when friends come along. Now the word gay doesn't mean that anymore, does it? Or more recently, just throw the word racism out there. The word racism has totally changed in its meaning.

One particular word, I think of that has undergone a change in its meaning, in my opinion, a very unfortunate change is the word hero. Who is the hero now today? Who is honored as a hero today? Well, all too often, we see that it is athletes who have performed well in a contest, that they are paid multimillion dollars to play in. They are considered heroes. Heroes of the Superbowl, heroes up the NBA Finals or of the World Series. We've also seen it apply in the world of politics where people are honored as heroes because of their gender or their race or whatever. They got elected to a certain office and so now they are a hero. We've actually seen where people are labeled as heroes and they haven't even done anything yet in the political world. Hero, with each case that it is used like this, the word is cheapened. It loses its status in society.

In fact, part of that disenchantment can be heard, echoed in the words of a song that was sung years ago by Tina Turner. "We don't need another hero." It was part of a movie; but the lyrics say 'we don't need another hero' why? Because, I quote, "We're looking for something we can rely on there's got to be something better out there." That which was considered to be heroes, wasn't heroes. That's why she sings we don't need it. We need something better and what is called the hero something like the four chaplains. You might say 'the four chaplains?'

Oh yeah, I'd like to take you back in time a little bit, back to 1943 seventy-seven years ago. On February 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1943 there was an army transport ship named Dorchester that was loaded with a bunch of young soldiers. Recent recruits, recent draftees, most between the ages of 18 and 20 going out across the North Atlantic. Might I add in February, the icy North Atlantic. There were 900 of these young soldiers on this ship; many would say 900 boys. They were 100 miles off the coast of Greenland, when in the middle of the night while they were there below deck, in the claustrophobic confines of the crew quarters, dark, airless, very rough seas. Men were vomiting, suffering from diarrhea, sick; it was hit mid-ship by a torpedo by a German U-boat. When the ship got hit began to split, it began to take on water, very quickly began to sink rapidly and it quickly lost power. 900 young soldiers, under the deck, terrified, sick and among them were four chaplains. The young men panicked, they were scrambling for life jacket, scrambling for gloves, scrambling to find the way out, scrambling once they did find a way out to find lifeboats there was pandemonium, terror! Those four chaplains, Father John Washington, a Catholic; Rabbi Alexander Goodie, A Jew; Reverend George Fox, a Methodist minister; and Reverend Clark Polling, a reformed minister.

The accounts of those four men are inspiring. They understood the role of a chaplain as defined by the Army; was one to provide comfort, guidance, and hope and they took it seriously. They tried to bring calm to the men, they tried to lead them out. They ended up providing some of those soldiers with their very own life jackets and gloves. Multiple accounts talk about these four men of different faiths saving their lives. The last they saw those four men, was as the ship went down, all four of them or standing on the deck their arms locked and each one praying. They had willingly given up their futures, their lives, their families, to try to help the men who the army had placed in their care. One survivor said, and I quote, "It was the finest thing I have ever seen or hope to see this side of heaven."

That's the story of the four chaplains, and it's a story that was quite well known in America for quite a while. In fact, five years later in 1948, a three-cent postage stamp was issued bearing their likenesses. In fact, to this day, there are still several churches and some chapels including

the Chapel in the Pentagon that have stained glass windows paying tribute to these four men. February 3rd was, years ago, designated by Congress, to be set aside as Four Chaplains Day. We don't commemorate it or remember it anymore. December 19, 1944; the distinguished service cross, which is for, and I quote, "Extraordinary Heroism was awarded posthumously to these four men. And at the same time, the Purple Heart was awarded to their next of kin. In 1961, 18 years after this act of heroism, a special medal of heroism, was awarded to them, again posthumously and only to them. The special medal of heroism was awarded and then by decree of Congress, was never to be given again. That's how great an act of heroism our country saw in these four chaplains. And I bet the majority of us, never have heard it, or forgot it years ago. Words, they really mean something. They really count for something and they really can make a difference.

That's what came up in a Bible study about a month and a half ago. We were studying mark chapter 15, what we heard in our gospel tonight. "My God, My God why have You forsaken Me?" I don't remember exactly who asked the question, but someone at the Bible study said, 'Pastor, what's the Greek word there for why? I just think there's something more to it.' And I have to be honest, I made a note for myself to look up why in Greek dictionary. What is it? What's it mean? And then I forgot to study it, to look it up. So, the following week I finally did. I looked it up, but I was shocked at what I found.

What we have translated as "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" In the Greek, there's actually two words there, that we translate into a three-letter word, why. Those two Greek words literally are: for who, or for what. And I want you to now think about what was happening on the cross. It's very similar to what was happening on the Dorchester. Jesus is on the cross. Why is He there? To pay the price of our sin, to bring us comfort, guidance, hope, because we as sinners have no hope on our own. He took our sin on Himself. He went to the cross and God the Father Almighty watched and He stood on the side. And when Jesus said, "My God, My God, for who, for what, have you forsaken Me, your only begotten Son? For who? Look in the mirror. For you, for me.

Just as those four chaplains had willingly given up their futures, their lives, their families, to see save those young men; Jesus gave up His place in heaven, at the right hand of God, for you, for me. And God the Father; think of this, fathers, mothers, think of this. Watching your child die, and having that child look at you, and realize you can save them. But you won't. Why? To save you, to save me; but not save the child. When we look at it, "My God, my God for who or for what have you forsaken me? Let's not cheapen it at all. It's for us, and that word forsake, do not cheapen that either. It means to disown. God disowned His own Son for you, for me. Jesus gave up heaven, His rightful throne, for you for me.

Within our country, within our state, within our county, within our city, there are so many distractions right now. But this Thanksgiving, let's look at the greatest hero, Jesus Christ and understand exactly what He did and understand exactly what His Father did. And then let us bow our head in giving Him thanks and at the same time lift up our heads and do what the Psalmist says, 'Praise the LORD, Give Thanks to the LORD,' for He is the hero for you and for me.

In our Savior's Name, Amen.