MEMORIAL DAY - 2004

St. Matthew 5; 44 Love your enemies; Bless those who curse you; Do good to those who hate you; and pray for those who despitefully use you & persecute you.

~~Will all the men & women who are veterans please stand!~~

~~WE ARE ALL GATHERED HERE TODAY TO REMEMBER OUR DEAR DEAD~~. IT WAS SOMETIME AGO WHEN I STOOD IN ARLINGTON NATIONAL CEMETARY AT THE GRAVE OF THE UNKNOWN SOLDIER. IT WAS AN IMPRESSIVE SIGHT TO OBSERVE THE GRACEFUL & RHYTHMIC MARCHING OF THE GUARD & HEAR THE PRECISE CLICKING OF HIS HEALS WHEN HE PIVOTED I READ IN DEEP REVERANCE THE INSCRIPTION IN HIS TOMB:HERE LIES IN HONORED GLORY AN AMERICAN SOLDIER KNOWN ONLY TO GOD! THE UNKNOWN SOLDIER & THOUSANDS , OF HIS COMRADES WHO DIED IN WORLD WAR I, WORLD WAR II & ALL THE OTHER WARS, AND NOW THE WAR IN IRAQ. THEY DIED IN THE BELIEF THAT THEIR SACRIFICE WOULD FINALLY BRING PEACE TO THE WORLD THAT THEIR CHILDREN & CHILDEN'S CHILDREN WOULD NEVER AGAIN EXPERIENCE THE HORRORS OF WAR. IF THE UNKNOWN SOLDIER COULD SPEAK TO US TODAY HE WOULD SURELY ASK US; Has there been peace since I died? And I can see the S H A M E ON OUR FACES: NO SIR,: THERE HAS BEEN NO PEACE

I CAN HEAR THE WORDS OF THE PROPHET ZECHAREIAH RINGING IN MY EARS: NOT BY MIGHT, NOR BY POWER, BUT BY MY S P I R I T SAYS THE LORD OF HOSTS! THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL HAD RETURNED TO PALESTINE FROM THEIR CAPTIVITY. THEY WERE A DISCOURAGED & UNORGANIZED GROUP. THEN THEY BEGAN TO REBUILD THE TEMPLE OF SOLOMON. BUT THEY CONTINUED TO FACE INSURMOUNTABLE BARRIERS! ALL OF THE POWER & MIGHT SEEMED TO BE ON THE SIDE OF THEIR ENEMIES. THEN CAME THE MESSAGE OF GOD TO TAKE COURAGE! THEN THEY WOULD OVERCOME THEIR ENEMIES THROUGH THE POWER & HELP OF THE HOLY SPIRIT!

THE CRYING NEED OF OUR TIME IS NOT FOR MORE MIGHT OR GREATER POWER! THERE WILL ALWAYS BE PAIN & SUFFERING & DEATH, BUT AS CHRISTIANS WE NEED TO EXTEND LIFE IN EVERY POSSIBLE WAY. AT THE END OF WORLD WAR II GENERAL PATTON ADDRESSED AN EPISIPOPAL CHURCH SCHOOL IN CALIFORNIA & SAID: YOU ARE THE SOLDIERS & NURSES OF THE NEXT WAR. THE ARMY NEWSPAPER PUBLISHED A LETTER TO THE GENERAL SIGNED, Private X. Part of the letter said this: I AM ONE OF THE 30,000 MEN WHO DIED UNDER YOUR COMMAND ON OUR LAST MARCH ACROSS EUROPE, LAST WEEK YOU TOLD A SUNDAY SCHOOL CLASS "YOUR CHILDREN ARE THE SOLDIERS & NURSES OF THE NEXT WAR!....GENERAL, WE DIED WHEN YOU TOLD US TO DIE. WE DIED - WE TRIED TO DO– EVERYTHING YOU ASKED OF US BECAUSE WE THOUGHT OF YOU AS A GREAT SOLDIER. WE STILL DO! BUT NOW, WITH ALL DUE RESPECT,WE ASK ONE FAVOR IN RETURN: "JUST STAY A SOLDIER! LEAVE THE PEACE UP TO THOSE WHO ARE WORKING THEIR HEARTS OUT TO MAKE IT STICK. AND .... STAY OUT OF MY LITTLE BROTHER'S SUNDAY SCHOOL CLASS! HE STILL THINKS I DIED TO MAKE A BETTER WORLD FOR HIM. TO THAT I WOULD LIKE TO ADD: DON'T EVER TELL MY SONS OR DAUGHTERS OR GRAND CHILDREN OR ANY ONE ELSE'S CHILDREN OR GRANDCHILDREN THAT THEY WILL HAVE TO FIGHT ANOTHER WAR. THEY SHOULD KNOW OF THE DANGERS THAT THREATEN US &

PROBABLY WILL CONTINUE TO THREATEN US FOR YEARS; BUT LET'S HAVE THEM WORK FOR P E A C E WITH ALL THEIR HEARTS.

BERTRAND RUSSELL, ENGLISH PHILOSOPHER. DELIVERED A LECTURE, SOME YEARS AGO, AT COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY, ENTITLED THE IMPACT OF SCIENCE ON SOCIETY. HE SAID" "THE ROOT OF THE MATTER IS A VERY SIMPLE & OLD-FASHIONED THING – SO SIMPLE THAT I AM ALMOST AFRAID TO MENTION IT. THE THING I MEAN IS -_____ L O V E – CHRISTIAN LOVE / COMPASSION!'" NO ONE EVER NEEDS TO APOLOGIZE FOR A REMARK LIKE THAT. IT IS SO PROFOUND THAT WE NEED TO SHOUT IT FROM OUR HOUSETOPS! WE NEED TO CARRY THIS MESSAGE TO EVERY CORNER OF THE WORLD! P E A C E WILL NOT COME BECAUSE WE PREPARE FOR ANOTHER WAR, BUT BECAUSE WE TEACH ONE ANOTHER TO LOVE ONE ANOTHER AS JESUS LOVED US! TO MEET JESUS FACE TO FACE IS TO STAND BENEATH HIS BLOOD-SOAKED CROSS & TO REMEMBER THAT HIS SORROW & LOVE ARE COMING DOWN ON US. FROM OUT OF OUR PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD'S AMAZING LOVE FOR US COME THE WORDS OF OUR TEXT FOR TODAY: "LOVE YOUR ENEMIES / BLESS THOSE WHO CURSE YOU / DO GOOD TO THOSE WHO HATE YOU & PRAY FOR THOSE WHO DESPITEFULLY USE YOU & PERESECUTE YOU!"

A DEVOTED MOTHER PLEADED WITH HER PASTOR TO DO ALL HE COULD TO HELP HER ALCOHOLIC SON. THE PASTOR QUICKLY BECAME DISGUSTED WITH HIM BECAUSE HE WAS SO REPULSIVE & UNCOOPERATIVE. THE MOTHER KNELT DOWN BEFORE HER PASTOR & PLEADED; '"IF YOU CAN'T HELP HIM FOR HIS OWN SAKE, PLEASE DO IT FOR MY SAKE! 'REMEMBER. HE'S MY SON.'"

ALL I NEED TO DO IS TURN ON MY TELEVISION SET & I QUICKLY SEE THAT THERE ARE PEOPLE SO VICIOUS & HATEFUL THAT I COULD NEVER LOVE THEM FOR THEMSELVES. BUT WHEN I STAND AT THE FOOT OF THE CROSS & REMEMBER HOW MUCH JESUS LOVES ME & HOW MUCH HE SUFFERED FOR ALL OF MY SINS, THEN IT BECOMES MUCH EASIER TO FORGIVE OTHERS. OUR CHRISTIAN LOVE DOES NOT SPRING INTO EXISTENCE BY ITSELF! IT DOES NOT COME BY OUR OWN WILLPOWER. IT COMES ONLY FROM GOD'S LOVE FOR US. THE APOSTLE PAUL SAYS IT SO CLEARLY:'"IF GOD SO LOVED US, WE OUGHT TO LOVE ONE ANOTHER !"

IF WE DO NOT DO OUR PART FOR WORLD PEACE, WE MAY NOT ONLY BE THE VICTIMS OF ANOTHER TERRIBLE WAR, BUT WE SHALL ALSO SHARE RESPONSIBILITIES FOR THAT WAR. ON THE OTHER HAND, IF WE GENEROUSLY DEMONSTRATE GOD'S LOVE IN JESUS TO EACH OTHER / TO OUR BROTHERS & SISTERS, WANTING TO SHARE OUR FAITH WITH THEM, PRAYING WITH THEM, TREATING THEM AS JESUS TREATED ALL HIS DISCIPLES. ONE THING IS ABSOLUTELY SURE: WE SHALL CERTAINLY ENJOY PEACE TOGETHER IN ETERNITY!

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