



Remembering Loss

Remember the days of old; consider the generations long past. Ask your father and he will tell you, your elders, and they will explain to you (Ecclesiastes 1:2).

My mother always called it Decoration Day. The high school band always led the way to the cemetery where a speech was made. The speech always ended with the words: "They have not died in vain!"

I always wondered why some people cried.

As a child, it was an exciting day. School was over. Summer was starting. Why would someone be sad?

Later, I learned. Some of my friends who watched the parade marching to the cemetery later marched to war. Some returned with broken bodies and some with broken minds.

Some now lie silently in that same cemetery. If they could hear, they would note the words, "They have not died in vain."

I have learned it is not a day for looking ahead to happy times. It's a time to look back and remember. It is rightly called Memorial Day.

It's all about remembering loss.

In the War between the States, America lost 650,000 of her sons. WWI cost America 116,708 deaths, including 43,000 who fell in the attacks by Spanish Flu.

Remembering a cluster of red poppies growing among the dead, a brigade surgeon penned the poem that begins: "In Flanders fields the poppies blow beneath the crosses, row on row."

The wearing of a poppy became the mark of those remembering those lost to war.

Much has changed since those days. More names have been added to the list of the lost.

Some are eager to move on to the future. "The past," they say, "is past." What good does it do to go back over what we cannot change? Why remember?

Those who have only a memory left of their loved ones might answer: "We cannot forget. We don't want others to forget."

At the 1945 dedication of the Fifth Marine Division Cemetery on Iwo Jima, Chaplain Gittelsohn said this: "We memorialize those who, having ceased living with us, now live within us."

God says: "*Remember the days of old; consider the generations long past.*" Then he tells us how to do this: "*Ask your father and he will tell you, your elders, and they will explain to you.*"

The younger do not understand. They must learn from the older. They need to be taught the true cause of war and the only source of peace.

True understanding comes only when they learn that God the Father lost his Son in the battle for our eternal life!

A cross became his memorial marker. But no body lies beneath it. That marker points to an empty grave. These are reminders of the life never-ending and the peace never-broken that he has won.

If remembering loss can lead us to remembering Christ, Memorial Day will have served us well.

For truly, it can be said of him, "He did not die in vain."

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