



NOW MORE THAN EVER WE STILL BELIEVE



Memorial Day/Pentecost 2007

Scripture:

Romans 8

Relationships not laws

14. For all those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God.
15. For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of relationship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father."
16. The Spirit testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.
17. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.
18. I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.
19. The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed.



**"Everything you are against weakens you.
Everything you are for empowers you."**

Dr. Wayne Dyer

TWO HOLIDAYS

Today we have two important holidays that fall on top of each other.

One is from the secular calendar of our nation, celebrated on the last Monday in May, that we call Memorial Day. We have extended a single Civil War remembrance from one day, to an entire weekend. We remember those who have fallen in battle by decorating their graves. I went past the Santa Rosa Cemetery yesterday, and there are small American flags all over the hill facing Franklin Avenue. Out in back, there are Avenues of Flags that will be set in place tomorrow. They outline the grounds in patchworks of lawn, laced with flowers. It will be quite spectacular.

FLANDERS FIELDS

By Lt. Colonel John McCrae, May 3, 1915

**In Flanders fields the poppies blow
Between the crosses, row on row
That mark our place; and in the sky
The larks, still bravely singing, fly
Scarce heard amid the guns below.**

**We are the Dead. Short days ago
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
Loved and were loved, and now we lie
In Flanders fields.**

**Take up our quarrel with the foe:
To you from failing hands we throw
The torch; be yours to hold it high.
If ye break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
In Flanders fields.**

NEW GRAVES

In the last five years there have been some new soldier graves added at an alarming pace. So Flanders Field is also the Catholic Cemetery on the hill, a cemetery in Rohnert Park, and other places where the bodies of soldiers lie.

Beside the soldiers are other markers of people whom we have loved. And so what I did not understand so clearly as a child, I understand much better with advancing years. Flanders Field is where the soldiers go. Today we remember.

My own prayer for this day is to ask God to give energy and courage to those people who have the power to bring to a speedy end the war in which we are currently involved.

Passing by the flags, I thought, now more than ever, we need to believe peace is possible.

PENTECOST

On the Christian calendar, today is Pentecost. It is our own special day that commemorates one of the three most important days in the history of the Christian Church. If the day that Christ was born is one, if the day of resurrection is another, then the day in which the disciples resolved to build the church in his name is surely a third.

Public speeches will be heard, mostly in churches, and carefully timed by people in the pews.

But it is a day we need to remember in our hearts because there is a lesson in it that

is just as contemporary as the new beginnings that we make in our own lives from time to time. As I tell you the story of Pentecost, don't listen as if it is a story from the past, but instead think of it as a part of who you are and the new beginnings of your own life. It is safe to say that we need to reinvent ourselves in every decade. Every ten years we ask, "Who am I now?"

THIS IS THE STORY OF PENTECOST

Following the crucifixion, the first task for the disciples, as instructed by Jesus, was simply to wait. He had promised that in Jerusalem they would receive the Holy Spirit, who would give them new power. On the first Pentecost after Jesus' resurrection, about one hundred twenty believers gathered in Jerusalem to pray and seek God's guidance. Early in the morning, the apostles, Jesus' mother, and his brothers were gathered in a house in the city when they were suddenly consumed by the power of the Holy Spirit. Perhaps this was the house in which they had celebrated the Last Supper just fifty days before. They each heard the sound of a mighty rushing wind, saw tongues of fire, and were able to speak in the languages of all the people who had come to Jerusalem in order to celebrate Pentecost.

Shortly after, Peter delivered the first Christian sermon, whose outline became the standard for the early church: Jesus Christ was the promised Messiah; the religious leaders were guilty of his unjust execution; the grave had not conquered Jesus. Instead, he had risen from the dead, and salvation was free to anyone who believed in him.

That day, Peter was able to persuade about three thousand people to be baptized into the new Church. I think they would need to move to the southern stairs of the

temple and use the mikvah baths in order to accomplish the things the scriptures say they did.

WHEN BELIEVING IS EASY

When your team is winning, believing is easy.

But what happens when the news is not good, when the outlook is guarded? What happens when believing becomes difficult?

If you think I am talking to you this morning, then you know that I am. Memorial Day is not about a day when believing was easy.

Pentecost does not celebrate the winning of the battle, but the beginning of the battle for faith. No matter where we are in life, we are always at the beginning of the battle for faith.

There is a poetry to it, there a wholeness to our battle for belief.

Do we still believe on days when it is difficult? The answer is yes. We must.

PAUL KNEW THAT.

Romans 12

12. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.
13. Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.
14. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.
15. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.
16. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.

17. Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody.
18. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.
19. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord.
20. On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head."
21. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

When you say, "We believe," begin with those words about rejoicing with those who rejoice, praying with those who need prayer, and hoping with those who need hope.

The faith that we believe in is not something we have memorized. Instead, it is something that the Lord has allowed us to feel.

The fundamental difference between the first century church and the Jewish faith that preceded it was that the church was about finding faith through relationships, and the synagogues were about finding faith through laws.

When we say we believe, we say what we are for.

"Everything you are against weakens you. Everything you are for empowers you."
- **Dr. Wayne Dyer**

"We cannot live for ourselves alone. Our lives are connected by a thousand invisible threads, and along these sympathetic fibers, our actions run as causes and return to us as results."
- **Herman Melville**

"Life is about not knowing, having to change, taking the moment and making the best of it, without knowing what's going to happen next. Delicious ambiguity."

– **Gilda Radner**

What do I believe?

- There are still some very good days ahead.
- The world is really, really interesting.
- The future is a lot like the past, only different.
- When faced with a choice of roads, selecting the road less traveled will always hold an adventure.
- Life is about relationships not rules.
- Attitude is more important than facts.
- Love is the most important attitude.
- You never get a second chance to make a first impression, but you always get a second chance.
- You're never really lost if you know where your center is.
- Put the big rocks in the jar before you try to put in the sand. Otherwise there will never be room for the big rocks.
- Live your life by the compass, not the clock.

- **John Cushman**

It is not easy to be a believer. In Sonoma County, it's not even very popular.

And so now more than ever, now when faith is difficult and the outcome is not entirely certain, this is the time that we need to make our own proclamations of faith.

In the face of all doubt and disappointment, we proclaim something that is fundamental: **"We still believe."**



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