

I'm Glad You Are Here!

April 19, 2015

Sermon By: Roy G. Pollina †

Many of you may know the name, Steven Ambrose. Steven Ambrose was a Professor at the University of New Orleans. He was, also, an author of many books on WWII. One of his books, one of my favorites, was D-Day June 6, 1944.

In that book, there is a story of a soldier. This particular soldier is in the Army Airborne. The story goes that our soldier is having a few beers in a pub outside of London in late May of 1944.

While drinking in this pub, he starts to have angry words with a corporal from another Airborne Division. Well, the words mixed with beer, a little anger along with a little bravado, soon turns into a fist fight. The corporal and our soldier exchange blows until they are separated by their buddies. As they are being pulled apart, the corporal yells at our soldier and says if he ever sees him again he's going to get a rifle and shoot him dead!

A few days later, our soldier is in a C-47 flying over Normandy. During the invasion of Normandy, those C-47 pilots had to maneuver up and down to avoid the flack of the German gunners shooting at the airplanes and, remember, it was in the middle of the night. The result for the paratroopers was that many who jumped that night missed their landing zone, found themselves lost and separated from their units. This is exactly what happens to our soldier. He was alone, he was frightened and it was his first combat experience with exploding shells and gunfire all around him. Alone he starts to cross a field, when suddenly a machine gun starts firing at him. He runs as fast as he can and jumps in a ditch by the side of the road. Just then, there

is a flash of lightening and he sees the outline of a man about ten feet from him in the ditch. Another explosion and our soldier makes out that his companion in the ditch is an American; a soldier from the Airborne, but then a feeling of dread washes over our soldier as he recognizes the other paratrooper. It is the corporal who threatened him and this time he has a rifle! About the same time that our soldier recognizes the corporal with the rifle, the corporal with the rifle recognizes our soldier. He runs up to him and he hugs him like a long lost brother. For the next three days these two soldiers, who were stuck in a ditch in Normandy, eat and sleep and fight together until they are reunited with their respective units.

In the Third Chapter of John's First Epistle we read this: "See what love the Father has given us that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are." I am here today in this Martinsville, Virginia church, a Yankee from Chicago, the son of a second generation Italian barber, raised by devout Roman Catholics yet an Episcopal priest. I am here to proclaim to you my faith in Jesus Christ and to claim with you our fellowship as Children of God. You and I probably have little in common by way of history, heritage or upbringing. You know little about me, my life, my background, what I like or dislike. And, I know little about you; your life, your upbringing, your hopes and dreams. But, we each got into a car this morning and drove to this place to do the same thing: to proclaim our faith in Jesus Christ; to claim our fellowship with other Christians as God's children. I don't want to be overly dramatic but, there is a war out there; a spiritual war for your soul and for

mine, a war worse than any D-Day Invasion, more destructive and more terrifying. Death and destruction are all around us and this...this church is the ditch that we jumped into for safety. We may have nothing in common; we may disagree deeply about a whole host of worldly things; but by God, I'm glad that you are here with me today!

Here, we have fellowship as God's children because here we have the light of the risen Christ. Out there is darkness. The temptations that darken your will and the forbidden pleasures that darken your mind. In here we have the light. In here we have the way, the truth and the life. We all start out, out there. The Grace of God leads us here. We all start out as sinners. We all come here to have our sins cleansed by the blood of Jesus. It is the blood of Jesus that unites us in fellowship as children of God and everything that makes us different becomes as nothing in the fellowship we share in Him. Our race, our education, our gender, our age, our wealth, all of the separators of the darkness disappear in the light. There is spiritual warfare that exists in the darkness: warfare that tries to elevate one race above another; warfare that tries to elevate one gender above the other; warfare that makes me want to take your wealth; warfare that makes you want to keep me in my place. But, here in the light, in the peace of the Lord, here we declare that God is king and we hug and greet each other in the name of Jesus.

Now I think all of this is a pretty convincing argument for faith in Christ and for Christian fellowship. You may be unconvinced. You may think that you can avoid being in here because it's really not so bad out there. I only have this one thing to say to you, "You have not been paying attention!" Or as John wrote: "Everyone who commits sin is guilty of lawlessness;

Sin is lawlessness. You know that he was revealed to take away sins, and in Him there is no sin. No one who abides in Him sins; and no one who sins has either seen Him or known Him. Little children, let no one deceive you. Everyone who does what is right is righteous, just as He is righteous."

The Greatest Deception, the darkest place in the darkness, is the place that convinces you that dark and light are about the same. You and I know the true light – Jesus Christ. No matter where you started, no matter who your daddy is, you and I share something more precious than gold. We are brothers and sisters – children of God. That is what we are! We are safe in the loving arms of our Father, in a lawless world that tries to live without God; safe in this place together. And, I am glad you are here!

Amen.