

# Armed Forces Ministry Sunday

## Sermon

### Strength for a Troubled World

*Selected verses from Psalm 46*

Travel with me in your mind's eye to Arlington National cemetery in our nation's capitol. You cross the bridge over the Potomac River, walk silently past the Iwo Jima Marine Memorial and enter the nation's most sacred military burial grounds. How many lives have been sacrificed on the altar of freedom for our nation? The numbers are approximate but accurate. The Revolutionary War, 4,400 dead. The Civil War, 500,000 dead. World War I, 116,000 dead. World War II, 407,000 dead. Korea, 37,000 dead. Vietnam, 58,000 dead. Now Iraq and Afghanistan, 3,800-plus dead and thousands more severely wounded from the conflict.

You walk slowly among the headstones of our buried veterans. Row upon row of gleaming white crosses stretch across the rolling hills to the horizon. You stoop down and read the names, the years of service given and whether or not they survived the war they fought in or perished in the midst of it. Your heart is moved to tears by the price paid to secure our place as a nation. Admiral and seaman, General and private, Captain and Petty Officer lie side by side. You will not forget their sacrifice, their devotion to duty to keep our nation free. But, then like the cold rushing waters of a mountain waterfall, your soul is drowned in the thought, "All lives end in death." No matter how courageous on the battlefield, no matter how brave in the face of death, all lives are laid to rest, finally, forever unto the end of time, all lives. . . . except one. Jesus Christ.

Here is the world's premier warrior. Here is the only one in the war-scarred history of the world that was beaten, slain, crucified, and left for dead but now is alive and resurrected! Because of His sacrifice, we can be strengthened in times of trouble by the psalmist's words:

*"Be still, and know that I am God;  
I will be exalted among the nations,  
I will be exalted in the earth."  
The LORD Almighty is with us;  
the God of Jacob is our fortress.*

More than one hundred years ago, Theodore Roosevelt rose to power as our 26th President. He came into office in the wake of an act of terrorism, the assassination of President McKinley. Roosevelt was a bull moose of a man, charged with boundless energy. His legacy dazzles us even today. He was the Colonel who led the Rough Riders in the charge up San Juan Hill in the Spanish-American war. He was the author and inspiration for our Navy's Great White Fleet. He secured the Panama Canal treaty and rite of passage. He won the Nobel Peace Prize for his negotiating skills to end the war between Russia and Japan. After two successful terms in the nation's highest office, President Roosevelt was willing to ride off into the sunset, but within a couple of years he positioned himself to make a bid for an unprecedented third term of office. These are the words that announced his intent:

"It is not the critic who counts. The credit belongs to the man in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly. . . who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotions of life, who spends himself in a worthy cause. . . ." (Works of Theodore Roosevelt, Vol. XIII, pp. 506 ff.)

The credit belongs to the man in the arena. Are you in the arena? Are you still in the fight? If the Devil can rip true faith from your heart, he will do it. If the world can seduce you from true faith with its tinsel, trinkets and toys, with impure desires, it will do it. Whose side are we on? Have you forgotten, O Christian, the Lord's Word for your life?

What has God said? "Tie it! Bind it! Teach it! Talk it! Write it!" So the Lord commands us. And what is the "it"? The unforgettable Word of God. Why must the Lord of the Church remind us so often and so strongly to draw strength from His Word? Could it be that the unforgettable, life-changing, soul-stirring, history-making deeds of Almighty God in Christ Jesus could ever be forgotten?

But, therein lies our greatest problem this side of heaven. For what we would never dream of doing naturally, we often do spiritually. We Christians can look for strength in places other than in the Word. We can dismiss the work of God in Christ Jesus in many ways. Our carelessness will seal our doom, shrivel our faith, and forfeit our souls. The consequences are eternal, non-repairable, and beyond redemption. So my friend, my message this morning is plain and simple.

Find strength in the midst of a world filled with trouble. *"Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also,"* Jesus said. Your treasure is your identity. So, what do you daydream about? Perhaps it is making money, and lots of it. Perhaps it is power, prestige, and recognition by others. Or perhaps your preoccupation is with things negative; sickness, old age, accidents, diet, medicine, and lack of income. In the treasury of our thoughts, our hearts will be found.

"Eyes right!" commands the platoon leader as his unit parades before the reviewing stand. "Eyes right!" rivets the attention of the platoon upon their commanding officer. One simple thought follows the command, namely, perpetual obedience to all lawful orders. Likewise, our Christian life is won or lost depending on our focus. We will never focus rightly if we first do not understand who we are in Christ Jesus.

I'm sure that you would agree with me that a Dachshund is a rather funny looking dog. They have short legs, a long sausage body, and ears long enough to dust the kitchen floor in normal stride. Years ago, I saw a large poster in a store of a mother Dachshund and her pup. The pup had all of its sharp baby teeth firmly embedded in the mother's ear, hanging on for dear life and pulling the mother's head down severely to one side. The caption simply read, "O Lord, how long?"

Such are the prayers of us all. In the midst of our distressed and troubled world we cry out to the Lord for cessation of our grief and agony. "O Lord, how much longer must I fight this battle? Is there any relief for me?" We daydream that the Christian life ought to be struggle free. And then the Word of the Lord gives us strength in our troubles:

*Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way  
and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea.  
Nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall;  
The LORD Almighty is with us;  
the God of Jacob is our fortress.*

Every Christian knows that forgiveness of sins, justification and eternal life are gifts of God's grace and a gift can only be received—never modified and never earned. Faith alone in the cross of Christ Jesus saves our souls, but faith is always under attack. The struggle to put our trust in God is always present and the enemies who wish to destroy our faith will never give up.

On one of London's typical foggy nights, the screeching wheels of a 747 had just touched down on the tarmac at Heathrow. The nervous pilot could barely make out the runway lights and the white lines that would lead him safely to the gate. Suddenly, a bright yellow service truck darted out in front of him. On the tailgate in big bright flashing letters the captain read the simple command, "Follow me! Follow Me!" And the lumbering 747 taxied safely home.

You are a Christian. Remember your focus. Following God is always a struggle in the Christian life. The devil whispers in one ear that God cannot really be trusted. He points out that the oppressive troubles of the world are evidence that God does not really have your best interest at heart.

Inspiration for the battle comes from the strength that God provides. We are often knocked down, but never out. In the deepest darkest moments of life when failure and pain swallow up your soul, one small voice whispers in the quiet stillness, "Get up! Get up! It's not over yet. Get back on your feet. Get back in the fight!"

Sanctification of body, soul, and spirit is a life-long battle. Repentance is a daily event. The righteous may fall, but still he rises again. *"I have been crucified with Christ,"* Paul writes, *"and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me"* (Gal. 2:20).

Precisely in our moments of trouble, the Lord of life reaches down to us with His everlasting arms of strength and love and places us squarely on our feet once again and says:

*"Be still, and know that I am God;  
I will be exalted among the nations,  
I will be exalted in the earth."*

The LORD Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.

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*The back page has been formatted to accommodate reproduction on a 5.5"x8.5" Sunday bulletin.*