

CAN WE SPEAK OF PEACE ON MEMORIAL DAY?

I once tried to say a word for peace-making on Memorial Day. I was the speaker at a community service at Crystal Lake Cemetery in Corvallis. It was a sort of somber celebration.

I don't know exactly what one is supposed to say at such a service, but one Marine friend made it clear that I missed the mark.

This was way back in 1982. It was before 9/11. It was before "shock and awe" and the Iraq and Afghanistan wars.

On that peaceful Memorial Day we honored vets from Vietnam, Korea and World War II. I don't know that there were any from World War I. War seemed a bit more remote, yet the remnants were all around us.

I couldn't help but think of a wider meaning of "veterans." Far more suffered than those we remember with that day. How can I not remember the wives and parents and children at those many gravesides where, after my words and sometimes the playing of Taps, the funeral director folded the flag off the coffin and give it to the widow?

Wasn't my mom a military veteran for her service during World War II when my dad was under attack on a destroyer in the South Pacific and she was alone at home with me and my four brothers?

We are increasingly aware that casualties of war don't end when it is decided that the war is over. Survivors come back with wounds they won't realize for years. Troops come home with addictions and lingering traumas and psychological damage. Each veteran's suicide is a casualty of war. Untold marriages have been left in ruin. Alcoholism and homelessness often trace to warfare.

And that may be the smaller part of it. We do not count the death and damage our actions have brought upon enemies, including numbers of civilians. When a terrorist suicide bomber kills a couple of dozen people it's major news. Are our drones less grief-making than a suicide bomber?

Think of the billions upon billions of dollars we pay in taxes, being told it is a small price to pay for the security of our homeland. How can we escape the fact that so much of our economy depends on the manufacture and sale of weapons of war? Did Goliath's armor save him?

And how can we escape the fact that the greatest danger to our homeland is from within. There's a gun-related death virtually every day. Domestic violence is a very present danger. Untreated mental illness...or untreated illness of any kind is a form of domestic terror. I'm sure you get my point. It's easier to fear a distant enemy than recognize the enemy within our homeland.

I don't know how to avoid it, but shouldn't we remember the full human cost to ourselves as well as others on Memorial Day?

I had lines in my "8 MOMENTS FOR MEMORIAL DAY" that said:

"I thought of those peacemakers who fought in other ways...

Where are their graves and flowers and flags and statues?...

Is it not as patriotic to prevent these graves as to fill them?

We must wonder whether we will ever honor peace-makers in a world ruled by generals."

That's what I said that day on Memorial Day. The service ended with Taps and a 21 gun salute. I could have quoted Jesus where he once said, "*Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called children of God,*" but I didn't.

Many, like my Marine friend, don't want to hear about peace on Memorial Day.