

**Remember 3**

**11 November 2018**

**Our hope is in our God,**

**Who made Heaven and Earth, the seas, and all that in them;**

**Who keeps his promise for ever;**

**Who gives justice to the oppressed.**

**The extraordinary thing about our Scripture readings today is how two “ordinary” people, two women are singled out. In our Old Testament reading God singles out a poor woman, a widow, as the one who will provide help and shelter for his prophet Elijah. And that woman, that widow, is so destitute and poor that she is literally preparing her last meal for herself and her son.**

**And in our New Testament reading, our Gospel reading, Jesus calls over several of his closest followers to see someone He finds so remarkable. In the midst of richly garbed men, important men, the movers and shakers of Jerusalem in its day, he says “Come look, I want you to come and see this woman who has put all these men to shame: Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. For all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.”**

**It is probably not coincidental that we have this reading at this time of year. As our farmer friends gather in the harvest for the year we think about – or maybe should think – about what has been our harvest, our good, that we have accomplished the year past – and about what we have not accomplished. And that thinking impels us to consider what we will be doing, accomplishing, in the year to come. What will be our contribution – both in terms of time we will commit and spend, what will learn, what friends and family and even strangers will we want to share the good news, and what of our monetary resources will we commit to the building of the Kingdom.**

**A few years ago a good friend asked me to consider a very serious and demanding ministry. Don’t give me an answer now, he said. Pray about it.**

**Pray about it. Probably a good suggestion for our considering what we shall give – of ourselves, of our financial resources – to our church for the coming year –**

**There are all sorts of contributions, all sorts of sacrifices.**

**As it happens this is also a day – one day in all of the days of the year – that we consider another sort of sacrifice – and a very great sacrifice – that of our veterans – the men and women of our military services who have sacrificed their lives – in all the senses that the word can mean – for our country. When we say “country” that really is sort of a shorthand way to say for our civilization in this particular country which has provided- for the most part - a peaceful society in which there is law and order and not chaos, a society in which we can rest at peace every night.**

**So for a few moments I would like to tell the stories –the sacrifices - of two veterans. One who served in the Revolutionary War which enabled us to become a nation, a nation in which we control our own destiny – and among other things – many other things – permit us to worship God – or not – as we chose.**

**And the other who served in what was called the Great War but we now know as World War One whose ending One Hundred Years ago we celebrate this year, indeed this very day.**

**Families were much larger in an earlier age. Death in childbirth was commonplace. Young people were of value in helping on the farm which required the hands of many more people. Life was much simpler. What happened when that time came for the family land, the family farm, to be passed down? If it were split up evenly with all the children, even the male children, after a couple of generations the average holdings would be so small no one could survive on them. One solution would be for the younger sons to go into something other than farming the family land – the army, say, or the ministry. The solution for the Cleaveland family living in Canterbury, CT, in the mid 1700’s would be for two of the younger sons Ebenezer and John to go into the ministry. So it was that Ebenezer, born on Christmas day 1725 and John entered Yale. Both graduated although there was a little controversy about the diploma. Both had been attracted to the Great Awakening – a movement to revitalize the Protestant church of that era eventually leading to (among other things) the Methodist Church. After graduation the two brothers moved to Boston as part of the new movement then to eastern Massachusetts area known as Cape Ann. There Ebenezer**

established a new church in what is now Rockport and his brother John in nearby Essex. In the late 1750's came the French and Indian War which eventually resulted in the British controlling Canada rather than the French. The British assembled forces a major part of which consisted of troops raised in the Colonies. Both Ebenezer and John volunteered and served as Chaplains. Their duties include what we would normally associate with those of a chaplain and assisting with the wounded and injured. After the war both returned to their duties with their churches.

As time passed there was increasing friction between the colonies and their British overseers. Events such as the Boston Massacre finally leading up to the "shot heard around the world at Lexington." The British held Boston with roughly 6,000 troops but the colonials assembled a force of 15,000 around Boston – a remarkable feat of organization and resistance if you think about it. About this time both Ebenezer and John sought and received leave from their churches to serve in the American forces – again as Chaplains and Surgeons mate. In Boston the British were concerned about the colonials control of the high ground including on a place called Breed's Hill in nearby Charlestown. The Americans greatly outnumbered the British but with green troops and confused command channels were disorganized. Some units did manage to prepare good defensive positions on Breed's Hill. The British attacked the Americans with their best forces June 17, 1775. Their first two charges up the hill marching abreast in the best military fashion of the day the British suffered extremely heavy casualties. Not until the third attack on the greatly weakened American forces did the British finally prevail – but at great cost. We, of course, know it as "Bunker Hill." Ebenezer served several more years in the American forces – as did his son. His church had to make other arrangements for its pastor but in his later life Ebenezer returned to it. There he preached the sermon on the death of George Washington whom he had known. He was its pastor when the new church – the church that stands there today - was dedicated in 1804. The 4<sup>th</sup> of July 1805 he passed away. The story is told that on his death bed a friend showed some concern over his future welfare. The dying man answered him, "I trust in the same God that I did when the bullets flew around my head." His grave overlooks the Atlantic.

One of those "must read" books I will probably never read is Hillbilly Elegy: A Memoir of a Family and Culture in Crisis, by J.D. Vance. Those of you who have read it will recall that in it Vance tells of his family moving from a small town in Kentucky to Middletown, Ohio. At a much earlier date a man named Lawrence Reynolds was also born in a small town in Kentucky. 1894 to be exact. Born into a poor family his mother died when he was quite young.

**His dad made a deal with a farmer in the community to look after his kids if something happened to him. It did. He was killed when his thresher fell on him. The farmer reneged and Lawrence knocked around for several years on his own. He had a pretty rough time of it. Finally at age 19 he signed up in the Army, fought Pancho Villa under John Pershing. In 1917 the Germans sunk the Housatonic and Woodrow Wilson finally got us into the Great War.**

**Still in the Army Reynolds was shipped to Europe and he and a buddy were informed they would be made squad leaders. Neither wanted to be leaders so they went AWOL thinking this would disqualify them for a leadership position. Their commander made them squad leaders anyway and both were assigned squads on the front line. This was on May 8<sup>th</sup>, 1918. In the ensuing battle his friend's squad was completely destroyed – no one survived**

**It was rough going for Reynolds' squad as well. Reynolds lost all the members of his nine man squad one by one as the enemy fired shells at the squad's position. Another shell hit near him and sent him hurtling through the air. Then another hit nearby knocking him back into his bunker. He managed to hold the Germans at bay during the night and finally buddies came looking for his squad and rescued him. The only one left in his squad he had held the line.**

**He remained in the army until 1920 rising to the rank of supply sgt. In addition to the purple heart he earned two silver stars and several French awards. The back injury he received that night on the front plagued him for the rest of his life. Back home in this country and stationed in Louisville, Kentucky his sister in Ohio invited him to visit. She encouraged him to move to Middletown, Ohio, and get a job in the steel mill when he got out of the Army. She wasn't too persuasive but a sweet 16 year old living next door to her convinced him Middletown was for him. Her parents made them wait until she was 18 before they married. He made a good career at the steel mill joined the American Legion where he was the bugler.**

**He and his wife had three children, nine grandchildren, and twelve great grand-children. He passed away in November of 1968.**

**Earlier this week I was putting together what I would say to you this morning. It was late evening. Then I heard them. I heard the C-130's flying over the house as they made their final approach to the airfield at our local air base. I have lived where I do so long that most days and nights I no longer hear them – I take them for granted. But that evening – thinking**

**about what I would say to you today – I heard them. “Thank you,” I sort of involuntarily said. “Thank you.”**

**Not too many days earlier I had gone to the Air Show with my new son-in-law and two of his boys – Now my grandkids as well. We had a great time. As we walked in the great bay of one of those C-130’s he showed us the door where he would stand with his parachute immediately before jumping out.**

**The Air Show over we walked back to our truck to go home.**

**On the way we passed a young Airman in full combat gear a weapon strapped over his shoulder. I glanced at his young face and thought to myself, “Why he’s just a kid!”**

**Immediately ahead of us a young family with two children stopped in front of that airman. “May we take your picture?” the wife asked hesistantly.**

**“Of course, you can!” the young airman said, grinning from ear to ear, as the two children stood proudly beside him as their mother snapped their picture.**

**God be with you young airman!**

**Thank you, young airman!**

**We live in a dangerous and contentious world. In the course of your life God knows the things you will see, the things you will experience – God give you strength.**

**To the men and women who fly those great planes day after day, night after night, thank you!**

**To all the men and women who protect and serve us in whatever ways and in whatever places, thank you!**

**To the men and women all during the years who have protected and served us in whatever ways and in whatever places and in whatever times, thank you.**

**And God be with you!**

**Amen.**

**Sources and further reading: Family Histories of the Cleveland family, local history publications of Rockport, Massachusetts, general internet information about the French and Indian War and the Battle of Bunker Hill. An excellent website about World War I is “worldwar1.org.” A good general**

**review of that war is found in Allen C. Guelzo's article "The Great War's Great Price" in the November 12, 2018 issue of National Review magazine.**