

Saturday "Sermon"

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Waging Peace

As we come to Memorial Day weekend once again, I'm reminded of a yard sign I've seen on Weaver Pike that goes like this: "If you can read this, thank a teacher. If you can read it in English, thank a soldier." There's a lot of truth in that.

Despite our yearning for a world in which all may live in peace, the sad fact is that, throughout history, communities and nations unwilling to defend themselves have not survived. William Inge put this memorably when he wrote, "There's not much use in the sheep passing resolutions in favor of vegetarianism while there are still wolves who like mutton."

The unpleasant fact is that we live in a world of sinners where selfishness and greed abound, where greed and self-interest frequently lead to conflict, and sometimes lead to war. I'm grateful to all those whose service across the years led to the freedom in which you and I will spend this weekend. As another yard sign puts it, "All gave some; some gave all." And we honor them.

I spent twelve years in the Navy, six as a Surface Warfare Officer on destroyers and six as a Chaplain. I'm a military man who believes in a strong military, who likes guns, and who likes to shoot. I subscribe to Edmund Burke's maxim that "The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing."

At the same time, I also subscribe to President Eisenhower's statement that "Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired, signals in the final sense a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed." Burke's statement and Eisenhower's statement are both true at the same time.

As we consider honoring our fallen heroes and heroines, I wonder what it might look like were our nation to "wage peace" with the same fervor with which we wage war. With respect to our current conflicts, I heard a missionary say something like this not long ago: "It takes \$10,000 to win a Muslim to Christ. It takes \$10 million to kill him. Which sounds like the better strategy?"

I know it's not this simple, but what might happen if our nation built wells and schools and roads and clinics with the same fervor with which we build airfields and barracks and rifles and armored vehicles? Walker Knight pointed out that "Peace plans its strategy and encircles the enemy. Peace marshals its forces and storms the gates. Peace gathers its weapons and pierces the defense. PEACE, like WAR, is WAGED." What might happen?