

Pastoral Prayer for May 25, 2025

Rev. Carleen Gerber

The tradition of Memorial Day was established in the years immediately following the Civil War when the women – mostly of the South – made it a yearly ritual to lay flowers at the graves of the soldiers who'd lost their lives. The price of war is grief and suffering. Theirs was an act of devotion and memorial.

As a preacher it's almost painful to try to preach about war. Is there such a thing as a "just war?" I really don't know the answer to that question. But it tugs at both my heart and my soul.

One of the ways that I honor Memorial Day every year is to read the long poem of Walt Whitman that is entitled "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloomed." Whitman served in the nursing corps during the Civil War and he knew well the heavy cost of lives lost. **And** he loved and admired Abraham Lincoln. He wrote the poem to expiate the deep sorrow he felt at Lincoln's assassination. Lincoln died on April 15, 1865; when the lilacs were blooming in Washington D.C. Whitman died almost 40 years later; but the poem lives on. I'll give you just a few of the opening lines- but I urge you to read the whole poem on your own, someday. Perhaps tomorrow....

"When lilacs last in the dooryard bloom'd,
And the great star early droop'd in the western sky in the night,
I mourn'd, and yet shall mourn with ever-returning spring..."

Would you join me in prayer....

Loving and eternal God, on this sober weekend of celebration, in the midst of a kind of turmoil we as a nation have perhaps never before endured, we turn to

You for strength and resilience and, yes, peace. We remind ourselves of gifts given with abundant and generous mercy: the smell of the lilac, the spectacular beauty of the Iris, the graceful woodland azalea that is scattered about only through the mercy of wild birds. We admire the still, gray-blue waters of Long Island Sound and the racing flow of the Connecticut River, fed even now with the run-off of winter up north. We anticipate the warmth of summer, and the gathering of friends in that season when time seems to move a little more slowly for us all. Our blessings are many, Loving God, and we need to hold on to them – cherish them – for they are the antidote to our worries and fears and sadness.

On this weekend of memorial, we remember those who have lost their lives *believing* that this country was a great experiment in the equality of all men and women- men and women who had a right to freedom and justice. Men and women who had a right to dream big dreams for both themselves and the generations that would follow them. The violence of war forms a tapestry of pain and suffering that is hard to imagine when we sit here in a beautiful and timeless sanctuary of peace. And yet – imagine it we must. For every war asks of us that we work to forge a pathway to lasting and just peace. And every war reminds us once again that there cannot be a lasting peace unless there is true justice for **all** your beloved children all across this world. And so far, Lord be with us, we have failed to build that lasting and durable peace. Help us, guide us, now and in the future, we pray.

In this week ahead, help us to hear your voice in the chatter of the birds, and to feel your presence in the gentle winds of Spring. Help us to find healing in great music, and in the shared company of friends, and in the laughter of children at play. Help us to remember that you are with us always and in all times – no

matter how infrequently we call You to our minds. Grant us peace at the end of every day and give to us your mercy to rain down upon our weariness, our frustrations and our fears.

All this we pray in the name of Unkulu Unkulu – a God bigger and broader than anything our limited minds can imagine. And in the name of Jesus the Christ, our friend and guide through all life's storms. Amen.