

Memorial Day weekend.

After WW1 it became a time to remember those who served in the military in general. In 1971 it became an official holiday. And it has broadened to be a time to remember all those who have died, with respect, honor, and thanks for them, for what they have done and what they have meant.

Because we hold to the separation of church and state it is possible to speak more broadly not only about what this means for us as a country and as families but what it means for us in the ultimate sense.

We look at the cost. Think of those who fell in such large numbers of our civil war and then again in the wars following, particularly in WW 2, a thousand a day are passing away from that service. But not only the military, also those who opened up our country. Those who labored to bring this land from wilderness to what it is, particularly the women. If you have read Rolvaag's novel about this, you know it was the women who paid the price and we don't think of that.

All the cost, the great things that were done and also the catastrophes. What does it mean? Victor Frankel has written a book, *Man's Search for Meaning*. This is a time when we reflect not only on those who been but also on what does it all mean? Things come and go. Is there anything really that lasts and is meaningful? Or is it all relative?

There are three religions operative among us.

Religion #1: 32,000 articles on the internet on the rapture. There was a Lutheran who died in 1752 named Johann Albrecht Bengel. He was an important thinker who predicted that June 18, 1836, would be the start of the Millennium, including the fall of the Antichrist, which he believed to be the Roman Catholic Church, the conversion of the Jews, and the reign of Christ for 1000 years as foretold in Revelation 20.

Most notably in our history in the US in 1844 a man named William Miller predicted, on the basis of his study of scripture that Jesus would return to earth in April, but that didn't happen, so he put it off to October, but it didn't happen then either and was called, "The Great Disappointment," for those who then have become the Seventh Day Adventists.

In 1914 Russell the Jehovah Witnesses said was to be the end. When it didn't come it was said to be spiritually there in 1918.

Then in 1993 the Branch Davidians in Waco, Texas, believed that they were living in a time when biblical prophecies of the Last Judgment were coming to pass as a prelude to Christ's Second Coming.

In this is a great deal of scorn but a looking at crazies and fools. How could people be so fanatic?

Religion #2 can be described in terms of certain things that are similar to Religion #1. (the gospel of the ecological apocalypse?)

In 1968 a professor at Stanford, Paul Ehrlich wrote a book called, *The Population Bomb*, in which he said there are going to be hundreds of millions of people starving in the 70's and it was too late to do anything about it. In his book, *The End of Affluence*, he predicted that by 1985 "mankind would enter a genuine age of scarcity . . . in which the accessible supply of many key minerals will be facing depletion." Then in 1970 there was in Life Magazine that on Earth Day predicted we would have to wear gas masks in a decade because air pollution would reduce the amount of sunlight by one half.

Dillion Ripley, Secretary of the Smithsonian Institute from 1964-1984, said in 1970 that in 25 years 80% of all species of living animals would be extinct.

In 1969 we had Hal Lindsey's, *The Great Late Planet Earth*. 27 million copies of the book sold. Created a sensation.

On the celebration of Earth Day in 1970, a prominent ecologist, Kenneth Watt, predicted that the world would run out of oil by the year 2000.

About that time, the eminent nuclear scientist, Harrison Brown of the National Academy of Sciences, wrote in the *Scientific American* that the world would run out of lead zinc, copper, tin, gold and silver by 1992, and there would be no copper by the year 2000.

In the 1970's the scientific consensus was that global cooling was the really big problem. Soon there would be mass starvation. A catastrophe was coming. We were 1/6 of the way to a new Ice Age. And because of these extremes droughts and floods and other disasters would follow.

January 1970, Life magazine announced that "In a decade, urban dwellers will have to wear gas masks to survive air pollution ... by 1985 air pollution will have reduced the amount of sunlight reaching earth by one half ..."

What we note about all this is that no one is lifting up these ecological doomsdayers to scorn. No one is laughing. Although, obviously these predictions are things that did not happen. Nobody is mentioning it.

There is a good story that comes out of this by the economist Julian Simon. He was speaking at an environmentalist forum and asked the large group: "How many people here believe that the earth is increasingly polluted and that our natural resources are being exhausted?" Every hand went up. Then he asked: "Is there any evidence that could dissuade you?" Not one hand went up. Then he asked: "Is there any evidence at all that could lead you to reconsider?" No hand went up. He then said: "Excuse me, I'm not dressed for church."

We have a kind of religion that is involved in all this. We have the bird flu epidemic and the mad cow disease. Nuclear disasters and oil running out. Whatever pandemics. People flee to virtual reality, to Star Wars and Star Trek.

In comparing Religion #1 and Religion #2 it is important to realize is that people become drunk on apocalypse, that is, we have to find some kind of religion. There is a curious similarity between the two. Both are yearnings, searchings for meaning. What does it all mean? Because things are growing crazy.

In a time of chaos, change, and upheaval both personally and the world at large, economically and sociologically, for that matter in the world of natural disasters we say: There must be some meaning in all of this.

In the second place there is a search for order and purpose. We have then what is called the search for utopia.

In the third place there are those who say: I'm going to be the savior. I'm the insider. I'm the one who will manage it. Be in control. (I am important and good.)

In the fourth place in disasters and crises there is a certain thrill, now something has happened, a shiver which is attractive. (the oxygen of hysteria). And finally, any of these and none of these could be right.

We have then the old contrast between Noah's Ark and the Tower of Babel. And this brings us to Religion #3. As we look here on Memorial Day weekend, where does it go? In terms of the cost? Is it just ebb and flow and nothing?

The text for today in 1 Peter 3 speaks directly to that where it says in vs 18: "For Christ also died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God." That is he is Lord. Lord of lords, King of kings, and this is what he has done.

And then it goes on in these much-discussed pair of verses: "He preached to the spirits in prison, who formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were saved through water."

Without going into the huge controversy and a lot of foolishness has gone into this, it is called the harrowing of Hell, and fighting between Christ and Satan, it really isn't saying that. What it is saying is that he has conquered sin, death, and Hell. And that means that he is Lord of lords, God of all gods.

Then it goes on to say in the next verse 21: "Baptism now saves you . . . through the resurrection of Jesus Christ."

In the midst of all this ebb and flow and meaninglessness, we look for hope and order and a future. He has done it. He is Lord. He has made us his own. And it is finished (John 19:30). Amen.