Every Memorial Day, I think about my father. His name was Jesse Mitchell. Daddy was a veteran of both the U.S. Army and the Air Force; he served in France as a tank driver during World War II, then left the Army after the war. Shortly after that, Daddy enlisted in the Air Force, where he served as a warehouse supervisor for 14 years. My father did not speak about his war years very often but many nights we heard excerpts of them. Daddy would yell and cry out during the night and, almost always, his explanation the next morning was "I was fighting the Germans again last night." After Daddy died in 1993, we found a collection of items in boxes under his bed. These included goggles from a German tank driver, a dagger with a swastika engraved on it and various other bits of paraphernalia that I began to understand came from dead German soldiers. When I saw the movie, "Saving Private Ryan" several years after Daddy's death, I got a vivid idea of the horrific conditions that led to my father having these wartime artifacts.

Though my father did not die during his military service, I do think it's appropriate for me to think about him on Memorial Day. During World War II, my father experienced, as did so many others, deep, crushing wounds from combat, fractures to his spirit and a kind of death in his soul that haunted him the rest of his life. As with most soldiers, Daddy was given a job to do and carried out his orders as he was trained. In so doing, he was exposed to the horrors of war and experienced trauma to his innate sense of right and wrong. He was forced to make decisions that no person should ever have to make, decisions that ended the lives of others and injured him beyond repair. This form of dilemna now has a name; the military calls it *moral injury*.

This Memorial Day, we remember those who died while serving in our armed forces. These men and women made the supreme sacrifice of their lives as they fought not just for our country's freedom but for the freedom of people all over the world. We also think about those remaining service members from World War II, Korea and Vietnam and more recent ones from Iraq and Afghanistan and other places where our military has been active, those who may be alive physically but who suffer every day because of wounds they have sustained in service to their country. Many of these women and men carry the burdens of deep physical trauma and profound emotional wounds like PTSD and moral injury, wounds that can bring a sort of death in the spirit. They, along with the families of those killed in action, deserve our support through our embodiment of the restoration, support and strength in Christ to all who suffer.

In his gospel, John spends a lot of time focusing on the last night of Jesus' death. The next day, Jesus would willingly walk to his death, would allow himself to be crucified on a cross in order to defeat the power of death in the lives of all he loved. We just heard a portion of the prayer Jesus prayed that last night. Jesus thanks his Father for the mission God entrusted to him: to show God's bright splendor and give real and eternal life to all in his charge. Jesus prays for the ongoing truth of the message he has shared from God and for the well-being of those given to him by God. I suspect Jesus knows he does not have to pray for what God is already prepared to do. Jesus is praying so that his disciples will hear his promise that they will not be alone, that God will make sure they knew they will not be orphaned when Jesus dies. The power of God's Spirit will be the disciples' confidante, consoler and friend, all the things Jesus has been in the three years he has been with them.

In that quiet garden, moments after Jesus has broken bread with his friends and before he is betrayed by Judas and Peter, Jesus lifts up those for whom he cares. This long weekend, we can imagine him praying for those who have made the ultimate sacrifice for their country, praying for their families, whose grief runs deep, praying for those who suffer life-threatening wounds that are not always readily visible. We can imagine Jesus praying for our nation, for these days of commemoration and thanksgiving. We can imagine Jesus praying for us in the days ahead, days which, in the words of David Lose, “will [contain] accomplishments and setbacks, victories and defeats, joys and sorrows, triumphs and tragedies on a personal, communal, national, and global scale. And,” Lose continues, “in all these things, God will be with us, comforting, celebrating with, strengthening, and accompanying us in and amid whatever may come.”

At the same time that Jesus prays in the garden for comfort for his disciples, he prepares them for their mission: to share the good news of real and eternal life given to all by Jesus. They will be the body and hands of Jesus in the world now, though they might not understand that yet. You and I may not completely understand it either, but that doesn't stop Jesus from giving us the same mission. Jesus is preparing us to be bearers of peace, hope and compassion in this world.

The best way to honor those who have given their lives for our country or for other countries, is to work tirelessly for justice and peace in all the world, to pray for and work for the day when there will be no more war, no casualities on and off the battlefield. The best way to honor those for whom our loved ones gave their lives is to feed the hungry, free the oppressed, fight for respect for the vulnerable and accountability for those who deny others their innate rights as human beings and children of God.

This Memorial Day, may we remember how our Lord loves and leads us, not from a lofty throne but in body and blood, with the Spirit of Truth and reconciliation, with a promise of peace to all who suffer in body and soul and peace among the nations of our world. When we ask, as did the thief on the cross, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom,” may we remember that Jesus' kingdom is already here among us and that Jesus has chosen us to be the messengers of that great news today.

Amen.

*Easter 7A*

*May 28, 2017*

*Floyd-Willis Lutheran Parish*

*John 17:1-11*