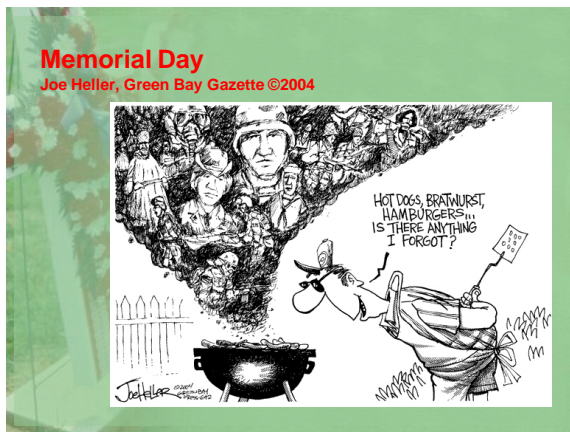


“How Long, O Lord”¹
Psalm 6:3²
Armed Forces Sunday & Memorial Day
May 28-29, 2011
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S1 – Cartoon




I don't know about you, but I, like a lot of Americans, can be forgetful. I get so caught up in the moment that I forget the things that are really important. I think this cartoon summarizes that very


well. This is Memorial Day weekend. Many view it as little more than the start of summer, in doing so they forget the real meaning.

Psalm 6:3

- **“My soul also is greatly troubled.**
- **... O Lord—how long?”**



Chaplain LTC Eric J. Erkkinen
US Army (Ret)



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S2 – Psalm 6:3

Our purpose in this message is to consider in word and prayer those who are serving and have served

¹ PR: LCMS resources for Armed Forces Sunday

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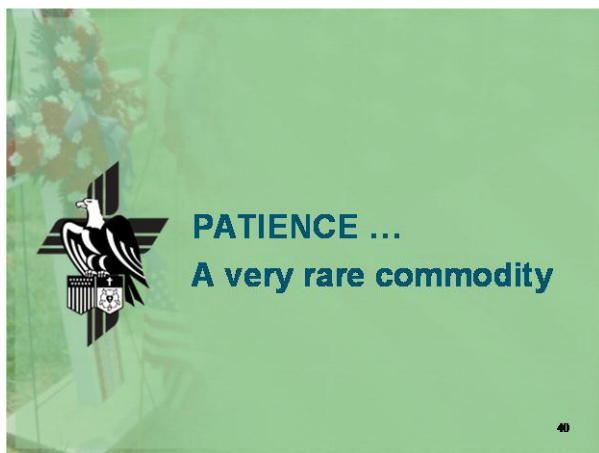
our nation, often at great price.

The basis of our message is Psalm 6:3: ***“My soul also is greatly troubled. ... O Lord—how long?”***

As we consider these words, I would like to thank U.S. Army Chaplain Lt. Col. Eric J. Erkkinen, Assistant Director of Synod’s Ministry to the Armed Forces, for the outline and stories included in this message.

Three central thoughts form the outline for our consideration on this Memorial Day Weekend, this celebration of our nation’s Armed Forces.

S3 – I. Patience ... A Rare Commodity



The very nature of the Psalmist’s question leads into the first thought for today. Patience always has been a rare commodity.

When was the last time you had this happen to you: you are at an intersection waiting for the light to change. Your mind wanders a bit, and suddenly horns are blaring at you because the light has been green for a few seconds.

This happened to me the other day. We were in the “20 item or less line,” the lady in front of us became rather vocal. A man ahead of her had more than 20 items in his basket.

Contrast that with the words of King David. David wasn't frustrated ... nor was it a matter of being annoyed. David was in danger, war was being waged, his troops were in the middle of it. Nothing seems to be working. This is an agonizing cry.

S4 - Soldiers



Perhaps a cry very similar to that of our soldiers in Iraq or Afghanistan. War rarely has a clear starting and end point.

The wars our nation is currently fighting appear to have no possible victorious outcome. Such a war drains every resource a person has. In the midst of such a war it is logical to cry out, ***“How long, O God, how long?”***



S5 – Despair – A Common Malady

This leads to the second thought we might consider, despair is a most common malady. When we read the

Psalm, did you hear the emotional and spiritual despair? David is feeling more than frustration, he is experiencing the anger of God at his sins.

He is praying for forgiveness, renewal, a right relationship with his God. He knows he cannot make things right, and so he begs God to make things right with him. He pleads for a closeness that can only happen when God makes it happen.

Closeness is something everyone needs. Closeness to family, to loved ones, to friends, to God. The pain of loneliness can be overwhelming.

S6 – Soldier w/ child



Many of our military personnel, many of our military chaplains, encounter such feelings. Prolonged deployments, often with little “dwell time,” (time between deployments), can leave troops feeling battle weary, and very much alone.

Family back home become frustrated, patience and energy seems to disappear, tensions and tempers flare, it’s all part of life at a time of war. When there seems to be no light at the end of the tunnel, where can one turn? To

whom can one look for strength, when everything around us is failing?

Oswald Allen asked and answered this when in the hymn we sang wrote:

***What should we do without You, When heart an eye
run o'er?***

***When all things seem against us, To drive us to
despair,***

***We know one gate is open, One ear will hear our
prayer.³***

For many years, our beloved Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod has been a leader in providing Chaplains for our nation’s military. These men, Ordained Pastors of the Church, stand alongside the military personnel, often meeting with them at the very times when life is most difficult. They are there in the times of training, and on the battle-fields. They are working through the unit’s at home, to provide the message of support and strength found in the pages of Holy Scripture. They join the church at large to proclaim, ***“Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth.”⁴***

³ LW 347 v. 4

⁴ Psalm 124:8

S7 – Deliverance ... The Gift found in Jesus



The third great truth taught in Psalm six, and shared by every Lutheran Chaplain serving our military is this: Jesus is the only answer, Jesus alone provides deliverance.

Listen again to our text and the verse which follows right after it. ***“My soul also is greatly troubled. But you, O Lord—how long? Turn, O Lord, deliver my life; save me for the sake of your steadfast love.”***

That is faith speaking. David understood this simple fact: no matter the circumstance, God would never leave or fail him.

It’s the same truth as we hear in Hebrews. ***“...looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.”***⁵

To our military, facing the loneliness of war, the Chaplain brings the reminder, God remains in command. In Word and Sacrament, Christ remains always present. He reconciles us to Himself. He strengthens and gives

⁵ Hebrews 12:2

resiliency to live for Him even in the most challenging locations.

S8 – Soldiers



How we should thank the Lord, we have LCMS active duty Chaplains. They stand in our stead, ready to share Word and Sacrament ministry, in every branch of the Military. As they conduct worship, counsel, provide pastoral care, they bring grace and forgiveness, love and peace in Christ, to men and women who often feel abandoned and alone.

Recently, one of our LCMS Chaplains was at a remote site near the Afghan border. 120 Soldiers were manning a small airfield. A week before his visit, the Chaplain had arranged a Lutheran Communion Service to be a part of his upcoming visit. When the time came, about half a dozen Soldiers gathered in the Chapel/Tent. Every one of them expressed their deep appreciation.

About an hour before the Chaplain was scheduled to fly out again, as was walking to the flight line, a young Soldier stopped and asked him if he was the Lutheran

Chaplain.” “Yes, I am,” he replied. “Great! What time is the Lutheran service?” Obviously, this Soldier didn’t get the memo. The Lutheran Chaplain paused and said, “It’s in five minutes over in the chapel. Let’s go.”

That Soldier was asking, “How long, O Lord, how long?” And the answer, in Word and Sacrament, was “now,” “right now!”

One of the greatest services you and I can render to our young men and women of the military is to remember them in our daily prayers. Remember their leaders, and their families, remember our Chaplains and Chaplain’s assistants as they serve in our stead, at the Lord’s command.

Pray that the stress or the actions of war does not cause permanent emotional, mental, spiritual, or physical problems. And, please pray, the Lord to grant that conflict and war may cease, and our troops may come safely home. Grant this, O Lord, for Jesus’ sake. Amen.