

## ***Sorrowing Spring* - by Joel Kurz**

Scarcely has a winter departed since childhood that I haven't journeyed in my soul to Shiloh, that military park along the Tennessee River where, on April sixth and seventh of 1862, roughly one hundred thousand soldiers engaged in a bloody conflict that claimed nearly a quarter of them as casualties. Each April I am again an eleven-year-old boy transfixed by the vernal landscape, transmuted by the history of great horror.

That year my Boy Scout troop made a spring camping trip to the enigmatic and grimly fascinating Civil War battlefield and cemetery. The experience still haunts me with the remembrance of beauty and sadness, the lingering mystery of life in the presence of death. I recall chilly nights and mornings tenting amid the barely leafing trees, taking welcome warmth and food from burning logs. We hiked through thousands of acres of fields and forests, monuments and cannons, burial mounds and gravestones. As we learned what happened at each place, I tried to put myself in the boots of those who had died and suffered there. Even in the company of others, I felt achingly alone as I beheld, dim and distant, a vision of peace beyond the battle.

Shiloh evokes a strange feeling in me each spring. I stand again at the small, tranquil Bloody Pond and see in my mind the wounded and dying soldiers crawling on the ground, stretching out their hands for water. I feel the cold and steady rain coming down upon me as I trudge through heavy mud. I lag behind in the fog at a churchyard and dwell on my own brief life and eventual death. How hard it is to know the harrowing hell of war.

When I return in my mind's eye to Shiloh, I think what a bitter contradiction it is that a place whose name derives from the Hebrew word for peace should become synonymous with slaughter. In Israel's ancient history, Shiloh was a place pointing back – and forward – to the Promised One who would bring “the gathering of the people” (Genesis 49:10). After the sanctuary which for three centuries housed the ark of God's presence was destroyed, Shiloh became a barren waste longing for the reversal of spring. Surveying this Shiloh and our own, like Ezekiel I can see, however faintly, the stirring of bones rising up, flesh being graciously restored, and God's own breath animating life once more.

## ***Tenting on the Old Campground***

### **Gettysburg Address**

Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battlefield of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field, as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.

But, in a larger sense, we can not dedicate, we can not consecrate, we can not hallow this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but

it can never forget what they did here. It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us—that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion—that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain—that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom—and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.

### [Battle Hymn of the Republic](#)

#### **Reflection for Memorial Day – Paul Alcorn**

Those who we remember and honor this Memorial Day Weekend all have names.

Stephen Ambler

Edward Ball

Ember Alt

John Sweetman

James Kelly, Jr.

Jesse Thomas, Jr.

Alfred Barker

Jennifer Moreno

Bruce Stanley

The names of some of them are engraved on the plaques on the flagpole on the Village Green which faces this church.

Most are long forgotten.

But, some are remembered still by family and friends.

But, each of them was someone's son or someone's daughter.

We honor their service and pay our respects.

And we remember, too...

- How precious and how fragile freedom really is.
- And, the grand vision upon which our country was founded.
- And, the high and heartbreaking cost of war.

And in whatever way we might...

In whatever way we are able...

Let us pray for our country as we rededicate ourselves to being thoughtful and active citizens so that day might come when the dream wrapped up in the words "*liberty and justice for all*" might come to be not only for us, but for all.

And as we remember those who have fought in the wars our nation has fought and the price that was paid and the heartbreak of their families, let us commit ourselves to finding better a way...

So that day might come when fathers no longer die a long way from home;

And mothers will be able return home to watch their children grow up;

And sisters and brothers and sons and daughters will once again know the embrace of their families.

We remember today, because we dare not forget.