

May 24, 2019 – Dr. Mosser’s Blog

On Memorial Day

We all vow to remember the important things in life, but it is very difficult, as the story I share proves.

My friend Will Willimon illustrates our high-minded intention of remembering with a story of just how difficult memory is for not only individual people, but whole communities bent on never forgetting. Willimon quotes Luminere, the man who invented motion pictures over one hundred years ago. Concerning the idea that people can immortalize motion on film Luminere said, “Death has been overcome.”

Willimon then goes on to tell a personal story of remembrance as he demonstrates the folly of such thinking:

Traveling in the South of England, our car broke down. While we awaited repairs, I wandered through the yard of the village church. Eventually, I found myself in the cemetery surrounding the church. Over in one corner of the cemetery there was a beautiful, low, brick wall enclosing fifty graves. The grass had nearly choked the plot. A large granite slab, set in the wall, bore the words, “WE SHALL NEVER FORGET YOUR SACRIFICE.”

Here were fifty graves of young men from the ages of seventeen to twenty-five and all from New Zealand. Who were these people and why did they die here, in this little English village, so far from home?

There was no clue at the churchyard as to who they were or the circumstances of their deaths. I wandered down into the village. I found the town’s museum and inquired there. The attendant at the museum told me, “Strange that you should ask, I have no idea, but given a few days I could certainly find out.”

As I was not going to be there a few days, I asked a couple of other people in the town. No one knew. I surmised that they were soldiers who were stationed in this little town during World War I. They were probably victims of the flu epidemic of 1918. And no one knew. The impressive inscription in granite was a lie. We had forgotten their sacrifice. No one could remember (William H. Willimon, from an unpublished sermon, “He Has been Raised,” Duke Chapel, Easter Sunday, 7 April 1996, appeared later in *Pulpit Resource*, Logos Productions).

Whether human beings forget or remember is doubtless not our theological and biblical issue today. What is at issue is the fact that God remembers!

Come, Worship

Stay, Learn

Go, Serve