

Soldiers of the Cross – Pastor Erickson

“Take your share of suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him.” II Timothy 2:3-4

Over Memorial Day many of us are reminded of the sacrifices our glorious men and women in the armed forces have made for us. Many communities will honor our military with parades and observances. We, also, remember our loved ones who have moved from the church militant to the church triumphant. Families visit the graves of their departed as a way to celebrate their lives and honor them.

This year Barb and I have celebrated the lives of two missionaries of the World Mission Prayer League whom we have personally known, who have been promoted to glory.

Margaret Lindell, who died eight days short of her 102nd birthday, was the wife of the first director of the World Mission Prayer League. Margaret and husband, Paul, both grew up as missionary kids in China. Their intention had been to return to western China as missionaries but the revolution in China made that impossible. God assigned them instead to the leadership of the Prayer League in its earliest days. After Paul’s untimely death of cancer in 1974 Margaret continued as the WMPL mission home hostess until retirement at age 75. She was a true soldier of the cross and influenced three generations of missionaries with her wisdom, simple life-style, no nonsense mentality, and good humored witness to Jesus Christ. It was an honor to officiate at her funeral, and a great blessing.

Another soldier of the cross who recently entered glory at the end of a lifetime of missionary service through the World Mission

Prayer League was Reverend John Johnson who, with his wife Audrey, began the WMPL ministry in southern Ecuador in the mid-fifties. I first met them when I visited Cuenca, Ecuador with a group of students in 1962 during the one-month Christmas Break at the California Lutheran Bible School. The environment in that Andean city was very resistant to the Gospel. John was dedicated to forming disciples of Jesus in rural areas as well as in the city. As a Lutheran Pastor he suffered much rejection and threats of violence during his years of ministry. He was a quiet man, a man devoted to Jesus, and to the training of leaders in the national church. When our young family was assigned to the work in southern Ecuador in 1972, he and Audrey became our mentors both in our ministry and in our Christian growth. He was a true soldier of Jesus Christ.

The scripture with which this writing began from II Timothy 2 instructs us in a very realistic way. It tells us that there are risks to be taken in the name of Jesus. There will be opposition of many kinds to confront in the spirit of Jesus. “Fightings without and fears within”. We must face them like a soldier. “In this world you will have tribulation. Be of good courage, I have overcome the world.” It warns us against the debilitating influences and distractions of the world which the Apostle calls “civilian pursuits”. Many of these “civilian pursuits” are what fill the screen for the young and old of our day, such that many dedicate themselves to them for life and forget the callings to be soldiers of Christ.

This Memorial Day I am honoring not only those who “soldier” for our great nation, but also for those who have given their lives to be soldiers of the Cross. We become their partners through our prayers, and our financial stewardship, and by giving them the respect and honor they are due.