

**Dr. Wm. Richard Kremer**

**May 27, 2007**

[www.stjohnsbaptistchurch.org](http://www.stjohnsbaptistchurch.org)

**“Lest We Forget”**

**I Corinthians 6: 19-20**

The great historian William Manchester once observed that he and his fellow soldiers who fought in the Pacific Theatre of World War II thought they were participating in events that would be remembered forever, that schoolchildren would be required to memorize the names of their greatest battles. But then he added, “We didn’t anticipate the velocity of postwar history; didn’t realize that events would succeed one another more and more rapidly, in a kind of geometric progression, swamping the recent past in an endless flood of sensationalism; didn’t know that instant celebrities would glitter blindingly and then disappear overnight.”

We simply think that our present world *had to be*.

But for a moment let us recognize that there were certain pivotal moments in our history when our future and our present hung in the balance.

There was a moment in spring of 1942

when the Japanese empire seemed ready to become the supreme military force on earth. Within a few months of warfare the forces of the Rising Sun had conquered a million square miles, a seventh of the globe, an area three times the size of the United States and Europe combined.

They were poised to go for more, heading to invade Hawaii and the Aleutian Islands in one direction, planning to use them as a base for an attack on the U.S. mainland, even as they headed south to conquer Australia.

A heroic effort by the U.S. Navy at the Battle of Midway stopped the Japanese navy’s thrust toward Hawaii.

An extraordinary resistance by Australians and Americans together on the island of New Guinea stopped the Japanese foray to the south, aided by perhaps an equally extraordinary effort on what soldiers of all sides came to regard as an “Island of Death,” a place called Guadalcanal.

But it is one thing to stop an invasion, quite another to end a war.

To accomplish that purpose the Allies knew they must bring the war to Japan’s own shores.

That could only be done by U.S. troops systematically attacking and conquering heavily-entrenched islands that were nothing more than outcroppings of hardened volcanic ash.

Every attack on one of those fortified islands meant walking into a deathtrap.

History has preserved and heralded a few of the more costly and amazing battles,

but there would have been no prominent, celebrated victories had not men been willing to serve and die to secure lesser places, names completely lost to us.

So this morning lest we forget, let me resurrect simply one of those little islands

where men were willing to offer their lives in the pursuit of ideals, a tiny place known as Tarawa.

Tarawa was protected by a reef, which the Japanese had mined and landing crafts could not cross,

meaning that soldiers must walk in water through a hail storm of bullets and artillery for several hundred yards.

Those lucky enough to reach the beach faced barriers of barbed-wire and concrete

that forced them into the path of sited machine guns and cannons.

The idea of invading such a space seemed ludicrous.

The idea of conquering such a place seemed foolhardy.

Indeed, the Japanese commander boasted that it would take “a million men a hundred years” to take Tarawa. In truth, it took seventy-six hours.

But though there were only about five thousand Japanese defenders of Tarawa, they inflicted 4,000 American casualties. Over a thousand Marines lost, no, gave, their lives capturing a little sliver of land so narrow that no point on it is more than three hundred yards from water.

Of the five thousand Japanese defenders, only seventeen surrendered, which tells us that every inch of that little spit of land is soaked in human blood – for our sake.

On this Memorial Day weekend, amidst our family cookouts, our celebratory gatherings, our golf outings, let us remember that what we consider to be our birthright –

our liberty, our democracy, our powers of expression – they have been bought with a price.

The present that we consider “had to have happened,” was in fact bought with a price, the courage unto death of freedom-loving people who have gone before us.

I would only add that Tarawa was not only a killing ground; it was also a learning ground.

Amazingly enough, our commanders had assumed that taking Tarawa would be easy.

They had assumed that a concentrated pre-attack bombing would eliminate any resistance.

They had assumed that all of our landing crafts would float over the reef, ignoring the advice of locals that they wouldn't.

They made a lot of assumptions that cost many good men their lives. But the lessons learned on now-forgotten Tarawa paved the way for celebrated victories at Iwo Jima and Okinawa.

Lessons learned through the shedding of blood on now-forgotten Tarawa paved the way for ultimate triumph – though that knowledge was bought with the lives of men.

Let us never forget, our freedom was bought with a price,

and that freedom is still purchased by the willingness of others to serve and to die.

Our Supper is suffused with the theme of memory.

Lest we forget, not only our political freedom, but our spiritual freedom was bought with a price.

Our God through the instrument of our Lord Jesus Christ came unto his own and his own, all humankind, received him not.

He died to express the divine love for us.

So we eat the bread and drink the cup lest we forget that our spiritual freedom has been bought with a price.

On this Memorial Day Weekend, as we participate in the communion of the saints,

let us remember that we live indebted to our God

and live indebted to the courage of others.

Let us live in gratitude, and in faith,

for that is the only way to do honor to the privileges that we enjoy

and the high price that has been paid to secure them.

Dr. Wm. Richard Kremer

May 27, 2007, Memorial Day Weekend