

## In Service

Psalm 116

2 Peter 1: 3-11



On a spring morning in 1866, not long after the Civil War had devastated the American south, a group of Southerners did something extraordinary.

They marched down the streets of what was left of their town to a nearby cemetery. There they decorated the graves of the soldiers. *All* the soldiers - Union and Confederate alike.

Those that were left, including the mothers and daughters and widows, had already buried their dead. Now they buried their hatred. The time for healing had come.

This was one of the earliest local efforts that would come to be known as Memorial Day.

Have you ever wondered why Memorial Day is observed in May? Most holidays commemorate an event – someone’s birthday, or the date of a historical event, perhaps the beginning or ending of a major war. Memorial Day falls on none of these events.

Memorial Day falls in May simply because that’s when flowers are blooming, flowers that can be used to decorate the graves of those who died in service to their country, in defense of the freedom to live and worship as we choose.

We hold these men and women close in our hearts. They are precious to us, and their sacrifice is also precious to us.

This weekend is about honoring them.

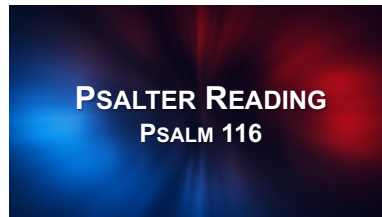


You’ll have the rest of the weekend for hotdogs and picnics, for flags and festivities. But this morning, for one hour today on a Sunday morning, I want to shift our focus away from being Americans and move it towards being Christians.

Those patriotic celebrations we'll take part in today and tomorrow are important, and we should enjoy them as a people who are thankful for where we live and for those who made it possible to live as we live today.

But they aren't things that help us on our walk in faith.

So that's what this morning is about: an eternal perspective in light of everything we celebrate this weekend.



As we are remaining in Psalms for a few more weeks, I would like to focus our attention on the 116<sup>th</sup> Psalm this morning. Let's read it together now:

*<sup>1</sup> I love the Lord, for he heard my voice;  
he heard my cry for mercy.*

*<sup>2</sup> Because he turned his ear to me,  
I will call on him as long as I live.*

*<sup>3</sup> The cords of death entangled me,  
the anguish of the grave came over me;  
I was overcome by distress and sorrow.*

*<sup>4</sup> Then I called on the name of the Lord:  
"Lord, save me!"*

*<sup>5</sup> The Lord is gracious and righteous;  
our God is full of compassion.*

*<sup>6</sup> The Lord protects the unwary;  
when I was brought low, he saved me.*

*<sup>7</sup> Return to your rest, my soul,  
for the Lord has been good to you.*

*<sup>8</sup> For you, Lord, have delivered me from death,  
my eyes from tears,  
my feet from stumbling,*

*<sup>9</sup> that I may walk before the Lord  
in the land of the living.*

*<sup>10</sup> I trusted in the Lord when I said,  
"I am greatly afflicted";*

*11 in my alarm I said,  
"Everyone is a liar."*

*12 What shall I return to the Lord  
for all his goodness to me?*

*13 I will lift up the cup of salvation  
and call on the name of the Lord.*

*14 I will fulfill my vows to the Lord  
in the presence of all his people.*

*15 Precious in the sight of the Lord  
is the death of his faithful servants.*

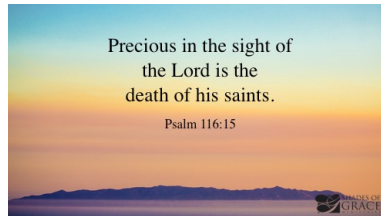
*16 Truly I am your servant, Lord;  
I serve you just as my mother did;  
you have freed me from my chains.*

*17 I will sacrifice a thank offering to you  
and call on the name of the Lord.*

*18 I will fulfill my vows to the Lord  
in the presence of all his people,*

*19 in the courts of the house of the Lord—  
in your midst, Jerusalem.*

*Praise the Lord.*



I want to go back to the 15<sup>th</sup> verse for a minute:

*15 Precious in the sight of the Lord  
is the death of his faithful servants.*

This is the verse that drew me to this Psalm this weekend. It's a fairly common verse to use in settings just like that in which we find ourselves this weekend. It's a verse of comfort in the middle of grief.

And in the context of Memorial Day weekend, I think you can see why it's a popular verse for a holiday like this one.

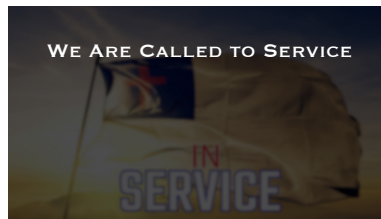
After all, what are we celebrating? We are celebrating those who served, and in their service paid the highest price.

Now, I hope I'm not bursting any bubbles here – but this was written a little bit before America was a country. And as the Word of God, it will last long after we're gone.

So there must be an everlasting truth here, one that transcends any sort of national perspective.



Actually, I see two truths here – not just in the 15<sup>th</sup> verse, but two truths that are woven through the entire Psalm.



The first is that we, all of us, are called to service.

This weekend, we celebrate people who were called into service for their country. That type of service is noble, but it's not the type of service we are talking about now.

I am talking about service to our Creator. He calls us to a different type of service. He calls us to a type of service Jesus put on display in the Upper Room when he humbled himself to wash the feet of his disciples.

To serve our Creator, we are to serve others. And that isn't glamorous.



During the dark days of World War II, England was having a hard time keeping men working the coal mines. It was a thankless job, totally lacking any glory.

Most men chose to join the various military services. They desired something that could give them a more active and visible role in the war effort.

With this in mind, Winston Churchill delivered a speech one day to thousands of coal miners. In this speech, he painted a mental picture for these miners.

He told them to imagine the grand parade that would take place when victory came.

First, he said, would come the sailors of the British Navy, the ones who had upheld the grand tradition of Trafalgar and the defeat of the Armada.

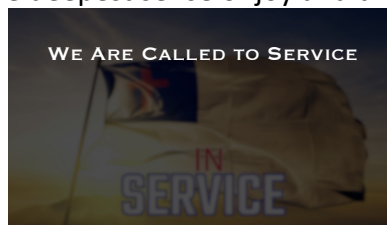
Next in the parade would come the pilots of the Royal Air Force. They were the ones who had saved England from the dreaded German Luftwaffe.

Following them would come the Army, the ones that had stood tall at the crisis of Dunkirk.

Last of all, he said, would come a long line of sweat-stained, soot-streaked men in miner's caps. And someone, he said, would yell from the crowd, "And where were you during the critical days of the struggle?"

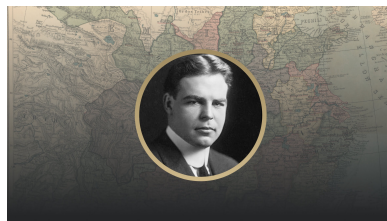
And then, ten thousand mouths would answer, "We were deep in the earth with our faces to the coal." We are told that there were tears in the eyes of many of those hardened coal miners. They had been given a sense of their own self-worth by the man at the top.

Service does not always come with ribbons and medals. And actually, I would argue that humble acts of service provide us with the deepest sense of joy and the most fulfilling satisfaction.



That is exactly the type of service we are called to. It's humble. It's not for everyone. But it's fulfilling. It's the type of service that will be recognized and rewarded by our Lord in Heaven.

Psalm 116 isn't just about service, though. It's also about the One we serve, and His heart for those who serve Him.



In 1904, William Borden, heir to the Borden Dairy Estate, graduated from a Chicago high school.

His graduation present was a trip around the world. He traveled through Asia, the Middle East, and Africa, and he was shocked by the poverty and hunger he saw. Writing home, he said, "I'm going to give my life to prepare for the mission field."

When he made this decision, he wrote in the back of his Bible two words: No Reserves.

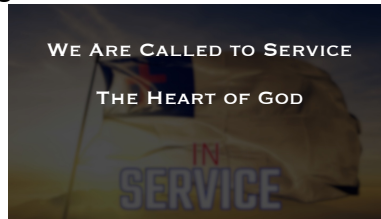
His parents tried to talk him out of it, but to no avail. He graduated from Yale University, he turned down high-paying jobs, and he enrolled at Princeton Seminary.

Now, he entered two more words in his Bible: No Retreats.

After completing his studies in seminary, he sailed for China to work with Muslims, but stopped first in Egypt for some preparation. While there, he was stricken with cerebral meningitis and died within a month.

Most people said, "What a waste of a bright young life." Even his parents thought that...until they flipped through his Bible. In his Bible, underneath the words No Reserves and No Retreats, he had written two final words: No Regrets.

No Reserves. No Retreats. No Regrets.



We can only find this attitude, especially that of no regrets, if the One we serve is both worthy to be served and treats His servants well.

Let's dive back into Psalm 116 to see what type of God we serve.

The first and second verses talk about a God who turns His ear toward us. We don't need to jump and shout and show off for His attention. He's far higher than we are, yet He turns to listen to us without us even asking for it.

Verse 5 talks about the fact that He is full of compassion. He sympathizes with our condition. After all, He sent His one and only Son to die in our place, all while we were still caught up in our sin. That is total compassion.

God's heart is also one of protection. The Psalmist talks repeatedly about a time when He was in trouble or in danger, but the Lord heard his cry for help and delivered him.

When we make the point of our lives to fulfill our vows to the Lord, there is no part of our lives that He takes lightly. Even, going back to verse 15, even when our lives draw to a close.

If we take our service to God seriously, there is nothing you can walk through in life, there is nothing that can be done to you in life, that escapes His sight.

And likewise, there is no part of our death that He does not handle with His infinite care. This is indeed One we can serve with no regrets.



Perhaps the 7<sup>th</sup> verse says it best:

*<sup>7</sup> Return to your rest, my soul,  
for the Lord has been good to you.*

You are not called to service lightly. But you are called to service for One you can rest assured will care for you in your service, and finally when it's time to retire to spend eternity with Him. And in that, you can find true rest.



Make no mistake.

You are signing up for service in which there are no reserves. You are called to serve now.

You are signing up for service with no retreats. Service to God isn't always easy, and you are not called to back off.

But you are also signing up for service with no regrets. The heart of God is unlike any other, and it is the only place your soul can truly find rest even in the midst of humble service.

We have a lot to remember this weekend.

As you go about your festivities, my hope is that you will also remember that you have been called into service. I hope you will remember what Psalm 116 says about all the Lord does for those who serve Him.

And I hope this weekend of remembrance spurs you to renew your commitment to be in service to God.

And all of God's people said...