

## Sermon 11 10 & 11 18 Veteran's Day

A few years ago I was serving as Interim Priest for St. Mary's Episcopal Church in Stone Harbor. It gets pretty busy in Stone Harbor in the summer. And St. Mary's had a concert series out on their front lawn on Saturday nights. Different groups or soloists would play out there. We were right on a main street so there was a lot of foot traffic.

And we put out chairs and served lemonade and iced tea and cookies (sooo shore in the summer!). And folks would pick up ice cream cones from Springer's across the street (the line went around the block!). And groups would come and play and sing for us – guitars usually for accompaniment, maybe an electric piano. But there was one guy who had a whole combo – I can't remember his name. His group was great. Every time they played, at the end of their last set for the evening, they would do a medley of all the anthems for every branch of our military services, the Air Force, the Army, the Navy, the Marines, the Coast Guard, the National Guard. They've all got anthems! And this group went through them all. And as each anthem was played, different groups of men – and women too! – would get up and stand at attention for their anthem, and everybody would sing along – as best we could.

And you'd look around and you'd see all these faces – some very young and some very old – and we all shared in this. All these people you saw every day at the store, or the gas station, or in a restaurant... standing at attention – saluting. For their song. *Their* song. And they were very serious. They might be there in their Bermuda shorts – standing and saluting – but they were very serious.

And what you realized was that they each had their own story... A whole story... A life story... to tell. And all those stories... they were important. They are important.

A few months ago, I think it was, a young couple asked me to baptize their little girl. The wife had attended here as a child. But they were currently living in the southern United States. The husband was stationed there at one of our military bases.

But they came up here to have their daughter baptized. Where all their friends could gather. So the day of the baptism came – and all their friends were here. And they were all young couples – some with children of their own – all babies – none older than toddler.

And when I processed up front here, I turned and noticed something extraordinary. All the husbands had dress uniforms on – all from different branches of the military. They had known each other before they enlisted. And then these friends had all gone off into different directions - different branches of the service. And there they all were – gathered back in our first few rows here. All these different uniforms. It was *very* impressive – colorful and unified.

So we baptized the baby – and went on to the Eucharist – and the service came to an end. And as I was saying goodbye to them, the daddy of the newly baptized baby told me he was being deployed in the next week. And he asked me to pray with him. So I did.

And he knelt down – right here in front – and we prayed. I laid hands on him and pronounced God’s blessing upon him. And we prayed for his safety and that he would be able to return to his little family well and whole.

And then a couple of the other guys came up. One by one. And I prayed with them too. Asking for God’s blessings upon them. And it was important. It is important.

None of us knows where we’re going to end up. Or how we’re going to end up. But we can ask God to come with us. And God will be with us.

There are those among us who have found themselves in the armed services, in situations of armed conflict. And I think we can all understand the words of the Centurion in our Gospel reading today.

Essentially this man was saying, “I’m a military man. I know what it means to have faith in others – to rely on others. And to have others who have faith in me. I know what it means to believe. And I believe in you, Jesus. I believe that you can heal my servant. I believe you don’t even have to come into my home to do that. And I would just appreciate it if you would. Thank you.”

And Jesus pronounced him the person with the most faith in all of Israel.

May we all have the grace to have the simple, strong faith of that leader, the Centurion. And may we all have the grace to share that faith with the children entrusted to us on this special day.