

My thoughts have been turning to our veterans. In my congregation over the years we have had retired members of the Army, Navy, Air Force and Marines.

My grandfather was in World War 1, dyed his hair and lied about his age to get into World War 2. His three sons, my uncles, enlisted. My dad was a Sea-bee. My brother's father-in-law was a very young lawyer who was involved in the Nuremberg trials after the war. My cousin Doug, was wounded in Vietnam.

I often thought of the lives of the soldiers and veterans as I volunteered with my therapy dog, Zima, for many years at the VA. I thought about how people of faith can also be warriors.

I recalled the story of Cornelius in the Bible (Acts 10:1-48). Cornelius was a centurion. He had a vision in which an angel appeared and told him to *"Send men to Joppa to bring back a man named Simon who is called Peter."* Cornelius called two of his servants and a *"devout soldier who was one of his attendants"*. Cornelius tells them what happened and sends them to Joppa. At about the same time, Peter has a vision of all kinds of animals and is told to *"kill and eat"*. Peter protests that they are unclean and he can't eat them! The vision is repeated and a voice says *"Do not call anything impure that God has made clean"*. Cornelius's men find Peter and he asks them why they have come. They reply *"We have come from Cornelius the centurion. He is a righteous and God-fearing man, who is respected by all the Jewish people. A holy angel told him to have you come to his house so that he could hear what you have to say."* Peter travels to Cornelius's home where he has gathered his relatives and friends. Cornelius tells Peter his vision and tells him *"We are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to tells us"*. Peter says *"You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with a Gentile or visit him. But God has shown me that I should not call any man impure or unclean"*. He then gives his testimony and recounts the events of Jesus' life and the many witnesses there were of those events. As Peter spoke, *"The Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message"*. The Jews with Peter *"were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles"*. Then Peter said, *"Can anyone keep these people from being baptized with water? They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have."* They were then baptized *"in the name of Jesus Christ"*.

We lived in Virginia many years ago and I remember an evening where we sat on the steps of the Jefferson Memorial in Washington, D.C. for a Torchlight Tattoo. It was the history of the United States re-enacted by soldiers in the uniforms and flags of each period. It was a wonderful experience and all of us tourists felt a surge of patriotism and pride.

Another day we visited the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. The tomb is guarded by soldiers 24 hours a day no matter the weather. It too was crowded with tourists, but the crowd was absolutely silent. We experienced a feeling of awe and overwhelming reverence.

At the memorial service for a member of our congregation, Bill Leek, an Army veteran, there was a flag ceremony. Again, the feeling of reverence fell upon those in attendance as the flag was unfolded by a young servicewoman and each step back a march. The flag was unfurled and held up. As the flag was refolded, each step forward was a march. Each fold

straightened and made perfect before the next step. The folded triangle was then presented to the family.

I honor those who have served and fear for those in war zones now. From ancient times to today, there are those who serve, go "in harm's way" and maybe lose their life. As a member of my congregation testified of his buddy who sacrificed himself so that he lived. It was a soldier who at the cross said ***"Surely this man was the Son of God."***

Winkie