Memorial Day 2020
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Monday is the official day designated as Memorial Day. It is a day that commemorates military personnel, men, and women, who have died while in service to the United States of America. In fact, most use the day to "decorate" the graves of those they have loved, military or not. The holiday was first established to honor the many Union soldiers who gave their lives during the Civil War. One historian said that the first Memorial Day celebration was observed in 1865 in Charleston, SC by thousands of liberated slaves and Union soldiers at the site of a former Confederate prison camp and mass grave for Union soldiers who died while in confinement. The "official" birthplace of the holiday is Waterloo, NY where it was first celebrated on May 5, 1866. After World War I the focus of the day was expanded to honor all who died in any war or military action in the history of our nation.

But I don't know if it has the same meaning today that it used to have. The original purpose of Memorial Day was serious and probably evoked considerable solemnity. Even as a kid, growing up in the 60's and 70's, I spent many a Memorial Day at the local cemetery. It would be an all day affair as people came in from all over to decorate graves and we got to see people that day we didn't get to see the rest of the year. And I certainly gained a measure of respect for remembering the dead, impressed by how so many – hundreds – would travel so far out of respect for their departed loved ones. It was an important day to them.

But observing it today, I have to ask what does it mean to folks? Is Memorial Day important to them? How many kids will spend all day tomorrow at a cemetery? How many American flags will be flown? Or is it just another "official" holiday. A long weekend. The "unofficial start of summer." Maybe it's the end of a school year for some. Could be a cookout day or family reunion day for others. Maybe there will be a passing mention of those who served in our military. Or maybe folks will not think of them at all. Perhaps most will not even think of their families and relatives that have gone on before. I hope not. Even though I will not be at that little hilltop cemetery, out in the middle of nowhere on a one lane country road, I will still be there in spirit, visiting all the graves in my mind, and remembering them. I think it is important to keep those links to our past alive so I hope everyone will take the time to do the same. Memorial Day is a solemn day that shouldn't be lost.

Now, today is Sunday, the first day of the week! It is a Memorial Day that far surpasses in significance the holiday our nation will observe tomorrow. This is a day when the Christians who make up the Lord's church are supposed to gather together to worship God and remember the death of our Savior on the cross. He made the ultimate sacrifice, giving His life on that cross for the guilt of our sins. He put His life on the line and paid our debt in order that we could have the opportunity to be set free from the slavery and condemnation of sin. He died to give us a chance to live eternally. The bread we eat brings to remembrance His broken body and the fruit of the vine, His shed blood on our behalf. I pray this weekly Memorial Day has not lost its significance. I hope Sunday is not a day to sleep in or just a day off work. I hope it is as solemn as it was in the first century when it began to be observed.