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Wednesday Facebook Broadcast Post
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Friends, in a few days we will enjoy Memorial Day weekend. I know I will enjoy this weekend more than most in the past because society is slowly and cautiously beginning to re-open in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis - and the thus-far very cool Spring is starting warm-up a bit.

It is my prayer that this weekend you may do some reading, reflecting, and prayer on *sacrifice*. The word 'sacrifice' comes from the Latin *sacra* and *facere*, meaning 'to perform sacred rites'. Yet, in a contemporary context it usually just means 'to give-up one thing to obtain another thing'.

As Christians, we cherish the Cross as the symbol of our faith. The Cross fundamentally reminds us of sacrifice: God's, sacrifice of his only son or Jesus' of his own life.¹ Sacrifice also runs deep in the Hebrew tradition: Cane and Abel made sacrifices. Noah made a sacrifice. Aaron and his successors, the high priests, sacrificed at the Temple. Throughout the Bible, sacrifice abounds. Whether it is was God, Jesus, or the priests, that which was sacrificed was sacrificed so as to *foster relationships*. God sacrificed Jesus to foster relationship with us; Jesus sacrificed his life so as to reconcile us to God.

¹ Although, my theology does not necessarily subscribe to 'substitutionary' atonement. That 'God sacrificed Jesus' is a common (orthodox) Christian understanding. Likewise, I do not necessarily understand that 'Jesus gave-up his life for mine' – also a common Christian understanding. Rather, I tend to believe that Jesus was a victim of Roman oppression and/or his crucifixion was a non-violent example of solidarity, selflessness, truth-telling, and servant leadership – in short, an example.

Sacrifices were made by the faithful to establish covenantal relationships with one another and with God.

This Memorial Day, we honor the sacrifices of veterans who fought and sometimes died in violent conflicts. We honor them because we assume, often rightly, that they died as a sacrifice for our freedom, our liberty, and our well-being as citizens of the United States of America.² They sacrificed their lives so as to foster relationships between generations, both past and future. They sacrificed their lives to foster present relationships. They gave-up one thing (their lives) in order to obtain another thing (the preservation of our lives) and their sacrifice establishes relationships between generations and amongst the present generation.

Today, I received a notice from friend and Brattleboro Selectboard member Daniel Quipp indicating that at the Selectboard's meeting last night it unanimously adopted a face covering resolution requiring "both staff and customers to wear cloth face coverings or face shields over their nose and mouth while inside the establishment". I welcome this decision in light of my Christian faith and in light of Memorial Day.

² I also acknowledge that often our nation has gone to war to deny these rights to others. The United States has engaged in numerous unjust wars (and genocide) to expel native Americans from their land. The United States has engaged in wars to, in effect, 'steal' large areas of land (for example, Texas, the southwest, and California). The United States has also engaged in wars of colonization and wars of utter destruction and death without just cause (second Iraq War). Arguably, USA wars have killed others unjustly more than is has justly preserved and protected our own freedoms and liberties.

While it may seem to be a small sacrifice to wear a face covering, it is a sacrifice that any Christian should be willing to make in order to foster relationships in the most fundamental manner – to protect lives. To wear a facemask is a very minor sacrifice to make in order to better protect Marion Abell who had surgery today, to protect the nurses and doctors who treated her, and to protect the cleaning staff at the hospital (such as Duo Xi). Wearing a facemask fosters relationship between me and a grocery store worker or pharmacist who perform essential roles. A facemask at our church protects Nan Mann, her staff, and the children under her care. Wearing a facemask protects the elderly in nursing homes who have a very high chance of dying if they catch the virus. In short, wearing a mask is a wonderful way of honouring those who fought and died, or lost a limb, or who became psychologically shattered for life due to the horrors of war by protecting those we encounter today.

I have noticed a very insidious dynamic occurring in our country as we approach Memorial Day. I have observed and read of a dynamic wherein the preservation or the exercise of individual rights is taking priority over that which is beneficial for the societal good. For example, people protest the compulsory wearing of a facemask as it is viewed to violate their ‘individual right’ not to. People protest universal health care as it violates their individual right to choose their employer’s plan. People protest stay-at home orders as

they violates their individual rights to 'assemble'. People protest measures to place limits on guns' lethality as they limit their individual rights to bear arms. People protest and repeal efforts to preserve the environment and to limit pollution of the air as a violation of their individual rights to, well, pollute the Creation. The dynamic has become so insidious that the exercise of individual rights has somehow become 'American' over and above the ethic to sacrifice for others! The right of the individual has somehow become priority over that which is beneficial for the common good. Don't get me wrong, I am all for individual rights! What I object to when it becomes a national ethic to prioritize one's personal preferences and freedoms *at the expense of* many others. I object when individuals' rights become worshiped, become idols, and others people's lives and welfare are to be sacrificed for them!

This Memorial Day, let us remember that as Christians, we believe Jesus taught and exemplified that we are called to sacrifice *for others*. This Memorial Day, let us remember as citizens of the United States of America, that our veterans forfeited their freedoms to serve in the armed forces and often sacrificed their bodies and lives *for others' welfare*!

During COVID-19, let us as United States citizens wear our facemasks to honor those who sacrificed for us so much more than we are by wearing facemasks. During COVID-19, let us a people of faith continue sacrifice our preference (and 'right') to worship at church by remaining at home until it is

safe for all our members to return to the sanctuary. Let us make Memorial Day about us sacrificing for others rather than others sacrificing for us. That is American and Christian! Let us forfeit our so-called 'individual rights' for the welfare of others. Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ did, as did our vetrans.