

Dear Fellow Members,

I'm sure you remember the words of Jesus as found in the book of John, Chapter 15 verse 13:

“Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends’. (NIV)

When I think of these words of Jesus this week one of the first people that come to mind is the martyred American civil rights leader, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Perhaps it's because during my teaching career my favorite study unit with third graders was biographies and every January we'd read Dr. King's bio sometime between his birthday on the 15th and the federal holiday honoring him on the 3rd Monday of the month.

With the recent headlines in the news, memories of Dr. King and the civil rights movement in America return again and again! I also think immediately of the 4th line on our UCC “BE THE CHURCH” banner that's hanging in the fellowship hall: REJECT RACISM. We need to see what we can do to further address this issue!

Jesus words also remind me of those WW2 D-Day allied soldiers who, 76 years ago today, gave their lives on the beaches of Normandy, France to turn the tide that led to the defeat of fascism in Europe.

I also think of my ancestors who gave their lives for others in serving our country. Two on my mother's side and one on my father's side: Great uncle, Union Army Pvt. Benjamin Benchoff, who gave all on Dec. 16, 1862. Great, great uncle, Union Army Pvt. Henry Henicle, who gave all on Jan. 8, 1864. Third cousin, USMC 1st Lieut. Glenn Henicle, who gave all on June 16, 1944.

Let us take inspiration from the courage and sacrifice of these and all others that you and I could name who followed these words of Jesus, and let us continue to make a difference in the world and if necessary lay down our lives for others.

There are even stories of animals who have laid down their lives for others, too. In fact, when thinking of animal behavior I read a piece recently by Bernie Parent, who writes for Philly.com. His piece was entitled, “There's a reason we call dogs man's best friend”. He wrote, “ We can learn so many things from a dog's behavior; personality, demeanor, resiliency and most importantly, the willingness to provide their family members with unconditional love, loyalty, and companionship down to their very last breath.”

As many of you know, at the end of February, Shelley and I brought our now 10-month old Shih Tzu puppy, Ringo, into our lives, and we have experienced the truth in Bernie's words. Ringo weighs in at just 10 lbs., and totally fits Bernie's description and more! He's also affectionate, smart, lively, curious, sociable, sometimes stubborn, and alert, and if he doesn't know you, you'll quickly see why his breed is sometimes called the

little “lion dog”, yes, for his body shape, but also because he’ll growl and bark to defend us and our home, until he learns that you are not a danger. I honestly believe he would lay down his life for us. Isn’t it amazing to see this behavior in the animal kingdom! Since this is my final Bridging the (Social) Distance message, I want to say that it’s been a privilege to be able to prepare them and have them sent out to you. You may recall that from time to time I used hymns or songs and so, since dogs are included in today’s writing I want to suggest two old favorites that I hope will bring a smile to your face. Both are still very popular as children’s songs and have many YouTube videos to enjoy: “Oh Where Oh Where Has My Little Dog Gone?” by Septimus Winner 1864 and Bill Merrill’s 1950’s “How Much Is that Doggie In the Window?” originally recorded by Pattie Page.

Shelley and I will be on vacation June 13 - June 27, so we look forward to attending our first re-opening worship service when we return.

Until then, take good care and we look forward to seeing you on the 28th.

Bob