

# Celebrating Our Heroes

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**Sermon: September 13, 2015**  
**Rev. Dennis H. Kelly**

This morning we gather together to worship God through Word and Sacrament on a weekend filled with a mixture of emotions and memories.

On Friday we observed the 14<sup>th</sup> anniversary of what has become known as 9/11, the day our sense of safety and well-being was shaken through coordinated acts of terror. Like the attack on Pearl Harbor and the assassination of President Kennedy, it is a day that will forever be etched in our individual and national memories. We remember where we were at, who we were with, and especially how we felt when we first heard the news that something tragic had occurred.

It was not to long after that first shock wave of emotion hit us on September 11, 2001, that we began to hear 9/11 two kinds of stories. One story involved those individuals who lost their lives in the attack. The other story involved those individuals whose actions were heroic in the midst of the unfolding tragedy. Sometimes the stories were about the same individuals: the men and women of the police and fire departments as well as the ordinary citizens who sacrificed their lives in order that others might live. So on this day that we “Celebrate our Heroes” let us never forget their heroic deeds or the families and friends that they left behind.

Last Monday, while many of us were in the midst of our Labor Day observations and gatherings, several thousand others lined the streets of an 18 mile route from Antioch to Fox Lake and back again to remember and celebrate the life of a Fox Lake police named Lt. Joe Gliniewicz. Though the details of his death are still unclear and slowly unfolding, the details of his life are not.

He was a husband and a father of four. He was an army veteran, serving on active duty and in the reserve from 1980 to 2007. He served on the Fox Lake police department for over 30 years. He was a mentor and a role model to many. And he lost his life in the line of duty just weeks away from his retirement.

Representatives from police and fire departments from all over the nation came to pay their respect. Many had stories to tell of how he had an impact on their lives. Monday evening Mary and I met some of those representatives outside of Suzie’s Swirl’s frozen yogurt shop in Gurnee. They were from Lansing, IL and Merrillville, IN. We thanked them for service and expressed our appreciation for their coming to pay they respects. Several of them shared stories of how they knew him and were mentored by him in the Police Explorers program, designed for those considering a career in law enforcement. And no matter the circumstances or details of his death that are known to us now or will be revealed to us in the future, it is clear that this man was a hero to his family, his community and his nation. So on this day that we “Celebrate our Heroes” let us honor the sacrifices he made remember the family he leaves behind.

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On Friday, August 21, 2015, Anthony Sadler, Spencer Stone and Alek Skarlatos were friends traveling together as vacationers in Europe. They were aboard a high-speed train between Amsterdam and Paris when a gunman opened fire. Together with two others, a French national and a Briton national, they risked their lives by rushing the gunman, tackling him and subduing him. Authorities say that this was an intended act of terrorism. If it wasn't for their quick action, many lives might have been lost. On this day that we "Celebrate our Heroes" let us give thanks for people like Anthony, Spencer, and Alek who willingly put their lives in danger to protect the lives of others.

Today we "Celebrate our Heroes." A hero is defined as "a person noted for feats of courage or nobility of purpose, especially one who has risked or sacrificed his or her life." Yet that definition does not do justice to those everyday heroes whose names are not always known to us, nor do their actions make it into the headlines of our news reports. They are the husbands and wives, fathers and mothers, sons and daughters, who answer the call to serve and protect our nation in the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, and Coast Guard. They are those men and women who serve in police and law enforcement departments; fire and rescue departments; ambulance and emergency medical services who put their lives at risk every day so that you and I can feel safe and secure. They are our ordinary heroes who are willing to serve in extraordinary ways at a moment's notice.

Last Sunday, during the Labor Day weekend, I spoke of a theology of work. Martin Luther was a proponent of the concept of vocation. He believed that God calls us to serve others through our work. A vocation is god's call to us to love our neighbor through whatever work our "station" in life gives us. There are a number of callings in each of our lives: parents, employer, citizen, members of the community, and more.

On the basis of this concept of vocation, I believe that those who serve our nation as members of the military and those who serve our communities in law enforcement or public safety are doing the Lord's work. So they are worthy of our expressions of gratitude.

This congregation has among its membership a number of heroes. In a few moments we will call out their names and express our gratitude. But I would also like to identify another category of individuals who may not think of themselves as heroes, but who none-the-less make sacrifices on our behalf. Those are the parents, spouses, and children of those who serve.

A friend of our family whose husband serves in the K-9 unit of the Waukegan Police department posted these words on Facebook after hearing of the death of Lt. Joe:

*Some days are harder than others. Some days you think ahead about how you'll tell your kids about their father (or mother). Some days you pull yourself together saying, "he (or she) doesn't have a choice to be afraid, so neither do I." Some days you cry. Some days you get angry. Some days you are tired and want to give*

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*in. Some days you wonder if it will be "that" day. Some days are harder than others.*

She also wrote:

*My head hurts. I cannot find words. My heart aches. My stomach is in knots. Please. Please. Please. Join with law enforcement and speak up. Speak up to stop the blind hatred, the threats, the targeted killings of these men and women sworn to protect us. Even if it doesn't stop the killings. Speak up to show those families of the fallen that their loss will not go unnoticed. Speak up to show those families their hero will not be forgotten. Speak up to show those families you stand with them. Do not be silent any longer. Your voice matters in the nation. Your voice matters to the individuals who put their lives on the line every day. And I tell you - it matters to their families.*

So on this day that we “Celebrate our Heroes”, let us also celebrate the heroes behind the heroes. Let us express our gratitude for those individuals and families who make sacrifices of their, sharing their loved ones with us so that our nation and our communities remain safe.

On this day, I have a profound appreciation for my father who served in the Navy for over 20 years, starting at the end of WWII, continuing through the Korean War, and concluding with the War in Vietnam. As far as I know he was never in the midst of active combat. If he did, he doesn't talk about it.

And on this day, I have great respect for my mother, who made the sacrifices necessary as a military wife. While my father would be at sea for months at a time, she stayed home raising three young children in a foreign country, far from family and home.

Many of you have similar stories to tell. So on this day that we “Celebrate our Heroes”, let us not only express our gratitude, but also share stories of our own personal heroes, who through their service to nation and community, are doing the Lord's work. Thanks Be to God.