

We meet here today to continue a practice begun in this place at least 117 years ago.

There has long been something distinctive about Memorial Day at the Stone church. The practice began in 1894 to remember and honor the several men who had served in the Civil War, by decorating their graves. Soon it became a day also to remember and honor those members of the church and Sunday school who had died during the year just past. In time, it became a day to remember and honor the veterans of other wars, especially those who in some way or other called this church their home.

The pioneer men, women, and children, most of them recently arrived from <sup>2</sup> Germany and Switzerland, who settled Codorus and Manheim townships more than two and one half centuries ago, had names very familiar to us – Bortner and Cramer, Krebs and Miller, Rohrbaugh and Werner, and more. Most of them probably believed that, however reluctantly, they were leaving far behind them the incessant wars and autocratic governments of their beloved homelands. Codorus and Manheim must have appealed to them in large part as a good place to hide from all that. Close to their hearts must have been the desire, for the first time in their lives, to be left alone.

And yet, within a short generation there came into Codorus and Manheim <sup>3</sup>  
from Philadelphia the clear call to resist the rules and regulations of a new mother  
country. In July 1776, only about one week after the adoption in Philadelphia of a  
Declaration of Independence, two young men from Codorus township, in their early  
twenties, answered that call by enlisting in Captain John McDonald's company.

Within six months they were part of an American army which, unfortunately,  
failed to prevent New York City from falling into British hands. No fewer than 2,800  
Americans were captured during the disastrous battle of Fort Washington. Some  
died in prison. Some remained in British hands until the war's end. Helfer Cramer

and George Krebs returned home after their enlistment expired and served in <sup>4</sup>  
civilian and military capacities until independence was achieved. There are  
tombstones for both in the old graveyard. One of them lived until 1833 and the  
other until 1842.

It turns out that Codorus and Manheim were never very good places to hide  
from the rest of the world. Buried in the old graveyard here was Christian Hetrick, a  
Codorus farmer and legislator who was commissioned a Brigadier General in the  
York and Adams county militia during the war of 1812. Memorial Day began here in  
1894 to remember and honor the several men who by enlistment or draft served in

the Union army during the Civil War. Just before the battle of Gettysburg, that war <sup>5</sup>  
closed in on a house almost within our sight this morning when its owner shot to  
death a Union dispatch bearer, thinking he was a Confederate soldier. George Bear  
was arrested, tried in Frederick, and exonerated of all charges against him. The  
young soldier was probably buried in the old graveyard.

During World War I the Sunday school secured its first service flag, which  
included about forty stars, three of which were eventually gold. The very last known  
American serviceman from that war died only three months ago, on February 27,  
2011. The service flag for World War II had about 110 stars, five of which were  
eventually gold. The ranks of these American servicemen are thinning rapidly.

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The calls for military service did not end in 1945. They are still being made, <sup>b</sup>  
and answered. If anyone doubts the strength of the American commitment to  
respond to the call of their government in our day, the events of the last month or  
so demonstrate clearly that it is as strong, courageous, and intelligent as ever.

In November 1863 President Abraham Lincoln came to Gettysburg to dedicate  
Soldiers' National Cemetery. In a larger sense, he declared, his generation could not  
really dedicate or consecrate that battleground. The brave men, both living and  
dead, who had fought there had already done that. He insisted that in truly  
honoring those men, both living and dead, his generation had to dedicate itself, to  
use his own words, "to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus

far so nobly advanced." By that he meant saving the Union, expanding freedom and preserving popular government in this country for the ultimate benefit of the entire earth. That was the word he used: the earth. 7

Remembering and honoring past and present military service is a duty which we gladly perform every day, but it is only the beginning of our duty. In 1863 Lincoln summoned a nation to the "great task" remaining before it. There is, if anything, an even greater task awaiting us.

Whatever we call it, a republic or a democracy, either or both, ultimate power in our system rests not in a congress, not in a president, and not in a supreme court. Whether we like it or not, whether we accept it or not, ultimate power and the

future of our beloved country rests with us, all of us. 8

The task before us today is enormous. We live in a world with about seven times as many people as there were when we gained our independence in 1783. There are millions upon millions now living in places which at the end of World War II scarcely counted at all in world affairs. We cannot ignore them today. There were fewer than 4,000,000 Americans when the first census was taken in 1790. There were about 30,000,000 when the Civil War began in 1861. There are now more than 300,000,000 of us.

Clearly our people are becoming more and more diverse. Fewer and fewer share the cultural heritage which long bound us together. We should not lament

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this increasing diversity. We have not tried to be a closed society. Remember that the document to which Helfer Cramer and George Krebs responded in 1776 declared that "all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights." The Declaration of Independence did not say that all men are created either German Lutherans or Swiss Reformed.

As we try to do our duty as responsible citizens, we are increasingly surrounded by what is called talk. Our precious right to freedom of speech does not require any of us to speak the truth when we talk. Much of what we hear and read is clearly wide of the truth or completely, probably often deliberately, false.

The future of our beloved country requires of all of us much more than mere opinion. It requires you and me and the rest of us to use our God-given hearts and minds to listen, to weigh, to deliberate, and then to speak and act only when we conclude that we have come as close to the truth as we possibly can. 10

Memorial Day is hollow and incomplete unless it provokes us to pick up where the soldier, having done his or her duty to the best of his or her ability, turns the great task over to us.

To the very best of our ability we should guide our beloved country in the direction of peace in the world, not war; of protecting our unalienable rights, knowing full well that for every right we possess we have incurred a responsibility; and of promoting the general welfare, not ignoring it. So help us God.

# Star Spangled Banner - 4th Verse

Oh! thus be it ever, when freemen shall stand  
Between their loved home and the war's desolation!  
Blest with victory and peace, may the heav'n  
rescued land

Praise the Power that hath made and preserved  
us a nation.

Then conquer we must, when our cause it is just,  
And this be our motto: "In God is our trust."  
And the star-spangled banner in triumph shall wave  
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave!