

Today we honor our members of the US Armed Forces. Men and Women who have volunteered to swear an oath, put on a uniform, and fight for our country.

We owe each member of our armed forces thanks for being willing to put their lives on the line in defense of what we, as a nation, value for ourselves and for other peoples who face aggression that threaten our or their way of life.

Our nation's founders put into writing in the U.S. Constitution those values that we so strongly defend: **"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all people are created equal and that they are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights. That among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."**

Looking back over human history, humanity has always fought wars... there always seems to be one group of people fighting against another group of people... usually over land, territory, resources...

There seems to be built within humanity a desire for conquest... to prove one group's superiority over another.

The Bible is filled with such wars – particularly in the Old Testament.

When we get to Jesus and the New Testament, we find an emphasis on peace, peace-making, and non-violence.... Love your enemies, turn the other cheek, etc...

But even within Jesus' teachings we find his assertion that "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends."

To be willing to die for others out of a love for them is the unspoken heart of what our Armed Forces men and women are doing when they sign up to serve.

We call it a love of our country... and that is what it is, in essence. But our country is identified by its country's men and women who hold a devotion to the ideals that are written into our Constitution.

We fiercely believe that all peoples are created equal and that they all should be given opportunities to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness...

When those ideals are threatened at home and abroad among our allies or those who cannot defend themselves against aggressors who would harm them, our members of the US Armed Forces have agreed to put their lives on the line ... to lay down their lives for their friends...

We as a nation have evolved and continue to evolve in our understandings of what waging war does to our nation and the world. We no longer seek to conquer other lands or other peoples. We do not send our forces to takeover other countries.

What we do, is defend our rights and those same rights in others...

This is not, however, the way other nations or state actors or terrorist groups or gangs operate... they do continue to try to conquer or overtake territories and peoples... usually by force...

Paul in his letter to the Ephesians tells the churches:

“For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.”

We recognize that attempts to overtake, capture, subdue, or destroy others has evil as the root cause. We have pledged to fight against those evils...

There may always be those who want to fight, to conquer, to demonstrate superiority, to take by force whatever it is they think they should be able to take... to deny others their rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

And as long as those threats exist, we will have brave men and women who will stand up and defend those rights.

There will be those who will continue to say, “Not on my watch.”

There will be those who will follow Christ’s example and show their love of country and love of neighbor and love of others by being willing to lay down their life for them.

Thank you to all who chose to serve, thank you to all who continue to serve.

We owe you a debt of gratitude and our unending respect for your service. Let us pray:

For Heroic Service BCP p. 839

O Judge of the nations, we remember before you with grateful hearts the men and women of our country who in the day of decision ventured much for the liberties we now enjoy. Grant that we may not rest until all the people of this land share the benefits of true freedom and gladly accept its disciplines. This we ask in the Name of Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**