

Pastor Brian's
Midweek Message
May 25, 2022

“WE REMEMBER”

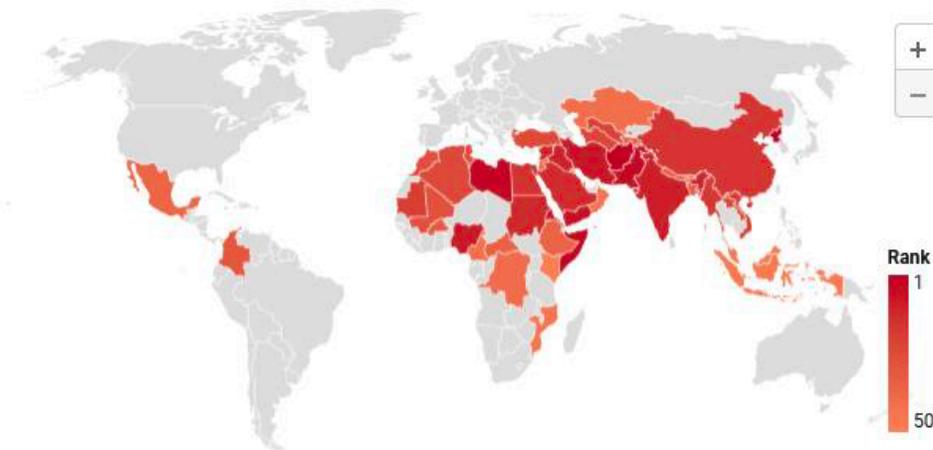
When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne. (Revelation 6:9)

As this coming weekend is Memorial Day Weekend, and we remember those who gave the ultimate sacrifice of laying down their lives for our protection and freedom. We are compelled to take time out of our relaxation and recreation to consider the depths of their offering to us. I recall the words of Winston Churchill, *“Never in the field of human conflict was so much been owed by so many to so few.”* He was paying tribute to the Royal Air Force (RAF) who defended England and Great Britain against the German Air Force in the Battle of Britain. The same can be said of those who went off to war to fight for our nation, these United States, and gave their life to defend us all, a small percentage of our total population.

I recall a humorous story from a number of years ago, related to the Church and Memorial Day. One day a small boy was looking at a large plaque in the narthex that bore the names and photos of members of the congregation that had given their lives in past wars. As the pastor happened to see the boy staring intently at the pictures, he walked over and asked the lad if he knew who these people were. He said, *“That’s what I’m trying to figure out.”* The pastor responded, *“these are our church members who died in the service.”* A horrified look came over the boy’s face as he asked, *“Which one, the 8:30 or 10:30?”*

Over the course of a couple of millennia a great multitude of Christians have given their lives in defense of their faith. Not long after the birth of the Christian Church on that Pentecost Sunday in Jerusalem, which we’ll celebrate again a week from this Sunday, persecution broke out against the early Church from amongst the Jews. Stephen the Deacon was the very first martyr as he was stoned to death for his testimony that Jesus is indeed the Messiah, the Christ. Within 30 years persecution reared its head at the hands of the Romans and Emperor Nero, who among countless others had the Apostles Peter and Paul put to death. The Church has been undergoing waves of persecution throughout our history. Research shows that 70 million have been martyred in the history of the Church, with half that number being in the 20th century! Another 1.1 million died for their faith between 2000 and 2010. Here is a map of where it’s hardest to live openly as a Christian.

The top 50 countries where Christian persecution is worst (Nov. 2019 to Oct. 2020).



We are to expect hostility from the world as we live out our lives following Jesus Christ. Jesus himself tells us to expect it. *“If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why *the world hates you.*”* (John 15:18-19) Looking at the map above we see that the United States is not one of the top 50 countries in terms of persecution of the Church, at least not today. But that could easily change.

What we must remember is the rhetorical question that the Apostle Paul poses in Romans chapter 8. *“If God is for us, who can be against us?”* (v. 31) The answer is *“NO ONE!”* At the end of the chapter Paul concludes, *“For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”* (38-39) In Christ we are safe and secure. Ours is a guarantee of life forever in Him, life that will be beyond our greatest imagination and hopes once we enter into God’s heavenly Kingdom through faith in his completed work of our salvation in the cross and empty tomb. Even in death we are victorious over all things, as death is our gateway into paradise. *“Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory in Christ Jesus our Lord!”* (1 Corinthians 15:57)