

Promises made

Psalm 131; Isaiah 49:13-16a

Eric Marinus Nelson □ First Congregational Church of Minnesota UCC □ 25 May 2008

□□□

This is a day of poignant and powerful juxtapositions.

On the one hand, a baptism. A beautiful baby boy, Silas Jay Srnec, innocent and wide-eyed and oh so trusting, completely dependent on the care of his family and those who surround them. Full of life and promise. And while we hope and pray for a long and happy life for Silas, our attention this morning is very much on the now, on the joyful eternity residing in this soft and sacramental morning.

A baptism centers us on the present and orients us toward a future of promise while a coincident event urges us to quiet reflection on the past. For this is also a weekend of somber national import. Memorial Day weekend, when we remember those who have died—especially those who died in our nation's wars—and we honor their memory. We will do something in a few minutes that we haven't done here in recent memory. We will read the names of those who have died. Not all of them, of course, but we will read the names of the Minnesotans who have lost their lives in the ongoing conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq.

War has become like background noise for so many of us. We are so insulated from it, most of us, and what we do hear, see, and read comes to us carefully packaged. For a long time we weren't even allowed to see the flag-draped coffins of Americans who died in service to their country's call. Perhaps the invocation of names will help us recall the humanity at stake wherever wars are waged, whatever the wisdom or calculation of their provenance.

As best I can tell from the names of these Minnesotans, they are all men. The oldest was 44. The youngest, 18. Four were teenagers.

Each of these, like Silas, was some mother's son. I will assume that most (though not all) were Christian and that one morning, probably when they were infants, their parents stood before a congregation like this one for the sacrament of baptism and expressed their intention to raise their son in the embrace of Christian faith and promise. Like Silas and his family, they received the assurance of God's eternal love, come what may. And in many cases, a community very like this one promised that baby boy their love and support, just as we have this morning.

Someone here will be Silas' church school teacher. Someone here may be his Confirmation mentor. Someone here may be a trusted adult he goes to as he comes of age faces decisions about what to do with his life. He may choose to be a soldier. He may choose to be a peace activist. He may choose to be both, or neither. We have promised to be there for him, and for all the children in our community. All of us share some part in shaping the world Silas and Julia and the other children in our community will inherit. All of us share some part in shaping the choices Silas will have to make.

We have made some promises today. May we help to shape a world in which Silas may come of age in security and peace. May we help to shape a world in which his life will be honored as a precious gift of God.

On this Memorial Day weekend 2008, we name and honor the Minnesotans who have died in the war in Afghanistan.

Corey J. Goodnature, 35, Army Chief Warrant Officer (CW3), June 28, 2005, Clarks Grove

Conor G. Masterson, 21, Army Specialist, April 7, 2007, Inver Grove Heights

Matthew R. Kahler, 29, Army Sergeant 1st Class, January 25, 2008, Granite Falls

Three Minnesotans.¹ More than 470 more Americans have died in Afghanistan since the 9/11 attacks on New York and Washington. We don't know how many Afghans.

Can a woman forget her nursing child, or show no compassion for the child of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you. See, I have inscribed you on the palms of my hands.

On this Memorial Day weekend 2008, we name and honor the Minnesotans who have died in the war in Iraq.

Edward J. Herrgott, 20, Army Private 1st Class, July 3, 2003, Shakopee

Brian R. Hellerman, 35, Army Staff Sergeant, August 6, 2003, Freeport

Dale A. Panchot, 26, Army Staff Sergeant, November 17, 2003, Northome

Patrick D. Dorff, 32, Army Chief Warrant Officer, January 25, 2004, Buffalo

Matthew G. Milczark, 18, Marine Private 1st Class, March 8, 2004, Kettle River

Tyler R. Fey, 22, Marine Corporal, April 4, 2004, Eden Prairie

Moises A. Langhorst, 19, Marine Private 1st Class, April 5, 2004, Moose Lake

Levi T. Angell, 20, Marine Lance Corporal, April 8, 2004, Cloquet

James J. Holmes, 28, Army National Guard Specialist, May 8, 2004, East Grand Forks

Demetrius Lamont Rice, 24, Army Corporal, July 14, 2004, Ortonville

David A. Cedergren, 25, Navy Petty Officer 3rd Class, September 11, 2004, South St. Paul

Daniel James McConnell, 27, Army Specialist, November 16, 2004, Duluth

Dwayne James McFarlane Jr., 20, Army Specialist, January 9, 2005, Cass Lake

Michael C. Carlson, 22, Army Sergeant, January 24, 2005, St. Paul

Mickey E. Zaun, 27, Army Sergeant 1st Class, January 28, 2005, Brooklyn Park

¹ Source: http://www.thefinalrollcall.us/database/Enduring_Freedom1_view.php.

David F. Day, 25, Army National Guard Staff Sergeant, February 21, 2005, Saint Louis Park

Jesse M. Lhotka, 24, Army National Guard Sergeant, February 21, 2005, Alexandria

Jason G. Timmerman, 24, Army National Guard 1st Lieutenant, February 21, 2005, Cottonwood/Tracy

Travis R. Bruce, 22, Army Corporal, March 23, 2005, Rochester/Byron

Kelly C. Hinz, 30, Marine Captain, May 2, 2005, Woodbury

Matthew Scott Lourey, 40, Army Chief Warrant Officer (CW4), May 27, 2005, East Bethel

Michael J. Fasnacht, 25, Army 1st Lieutenant, June 8, 2005, Mankato

Bryan James Opskar, 32, Marine Sergeant, July 23, 2005, Princeton

Michael A. Benson, 40, Army Sergeant 1st Class, August 10, 2005, Winona

Elden D. Arcand, 22, Army Private 1st Class, August 21, 2005, White Bear Lake

Jacob T. Vanderbosch, 21, Army Specialist, October 3, 2005, Vadnais Heights

Brett E. Angus, 40, Marine Master Sergeant, November 26, 2005, St. Paul

Anthony T. McElveen, 20, Marine Corporal, December 1, 2005, Little Falls

Scott T. Modeen, 24, Marine Lance Corporal, December 1, 2005, Hennepin

Kenneth B. Pospisil, 35, Marine Staff Sergeant, December 14, 2005, Andover

Andrew J. Kemple, 23, Army Corporal, February 12, 2006, Cambridge

Robert G. Posivio III, 22, Marine Lance Corporal, May 23, 2006, Sherburn

Nathanael J. Doring, 31, Marine Captain, May 27, 2006, Apple Valley

Brent W. Koch, 22, Army National Guard Specialist, June 16, 2006, Morton

Kyle Miller, 19, Army National Guard Specialist, June 29, 2006, Willmar

Troy Carlin Linden, 22, Army Corporal, July 8, 2006, Detroit Lakes

Qixing Lee, 20, Army Specialist, August 27, 2006, Minneapolis

Joshua R. Hanson, 27, Army National Guard Sergeant, August 30, 2006, St. Paul

Johnathan Benson, 21, Marine Corporal, September 9, 2006, North Branch

Kevin M. Witte, 27, Army Staff Sergeant, October 20, 2006, Beardsley

Bryan T. McDonough, 22, Army National Guard Specialist, December 2, 2006, Maplewood
Corey J. Rystad, 20, Army National Guard Sergeant, December 2, 2006, Red Lake Falls
Nicholas D. Turcotte, 23, Army National Guard Sergeant, December 4, 2006, Maple Grove
James M. Wosika Jr., 24, Army Sergeant, January 9, 2007, St. Paul
Michael C. Mettelle, 44, Army Sergeant Major, February 1, 2007, St. Paul
William J. Beardsley, 25, Army Sergeant, February 26, 2007, Coon Rapids
Chad M. Allen, 25, Marine Sergeant, February 28, 2007, Maple Lake
Greg N. Riewer, 28, Army National Guard Sergeant, March 23, 2007, Frazee
Sean K. McDonald, 21, Army Specialist, March 25, 2007, Rosemount
Daniel R. Olsen, 20, Marine Lance Corporal, April 2, 2007, Eagan
Joshua A. Schmit, 26, Army Reserve Sergeant, April 14, 2007, Willmar
Robert J. Dixon, 27, Army Specialist, May 6, 2007, Minneapolis
Jason A. Schumann, 23, Army Sergeant, May 19, 2007, Hawley
Anthony D. Hebert, 19, Army Private 1st Class, June 21, 2007, Lake City
Jacob M. Thompson, 26, Army Staff Sergeant, August 6, 2007, North Mankato
Andrew P. Nelson, 22, Army Staff Sergeant, August 29, 2007, Moorhead
John J. Tobiason, 42, Army Sergeant 1st Class, November 28, 2007, Bloomington
Randy W. Pickering, 31, Army Specialist, December 9, 2007, Bovey
Joshua R. Anderson, 24, Army Private 1st Class, January 2, 2008, Jordan
Jacob J. Fairbanks, 22, Army Specialist, April 9, 2008, Saint Paul

Sixty Minnesotans.² 4081 Americans have been killed in Iraq since the American invasion. We don't know how many Iraqis.

Can a woman forget her nursing child, or show no compassion for the child of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you. See, I have inscribed you on the palms of my hands.

² Source: <http://icasualties.org/oif/USDeaths.aspx>.

On this Memorial Day weekend, we remember those who have died in the past seven years in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and those who died in other wars in years past. We honor their lives and their dedication, and we pray for those who grieve their loss.

Receive them into your loving arms, O God, and grant them peace at last. God in your mercy... hear our prayer.