

FIRST AND CENTER
Pastor's Blog
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I have been watching the new Ken Burns/Lynn Novick documentary on the Vietnam War on PBS this week. I was a child and teenager throughout the war; I remember Walter Cronkite on TV every night giving the counts of US and Enemy Dead and Wounded. Sometimes I think we need to see that for Afghanistan to make it more real to all of us that we are now engaged in a war that has lasted longer than Vietnam did for us (of course, the Vietnamese suffered through war with the Japanese and French before we ever got there). I am learning a great deal from this film that I never knew. I am reminded nightly that those who do not remember history are doomed to repeat it.

Into the midst of this, I am preparing to take part in what is called the Rochambeau Service on Saturday at Center Church. Apparently, every year, the Ceremonial Governor's Foot Guard meets up with some French dignitaries and they march from the Old State House to Center Church, where we have a brief service (and their band plays), and then we proceed out to the Ancient Burying Ground to lay wreaths at the memorials to both the Foot Guard and Thomas Hooker. This ritual is meant to remember a time during the American Revolution when George Washington and the French General Rochambeau met in Hartford to plan strategy to work together to defeat the British and free the colonies.

I admit when I first heard about this service, I was a bit hesitant. I worried they were bringing their weapons into the sanctuary (I'm told they will not). I couldn't figure out what I was doing at an event celebrating the collaboration of two armies. Especially after remembering the subsequent history of both our countries concerning colonies elsewhere in the world whose freedom we thwarted.

So, what shall I do on Saturday? Remember. Remember how our European colonist ancestors valued freedom. Remember how the enslaved Africans commemorated in the Burying Ground yearned and died for their freedom. Remember that there are many around the world today struggling for freedom. And remember that we learned that two nations working together could help bring a measure of freedom. As international leaders meet at the UN this week, perhaps remembering these things just might help us move into a more just future.

~ Rev. Shelly Stackhouse,
Pastor