Oh, look ... it’s June 6—very notable in history as we remember the Allied invasion of Normandy on that day in 1944 WWII. There are few still with us who were part of combat in that terrible war, and fewer still who stormed those very beaches, or glided/parachuted into the French countryside under hostile fire. So in post Memorial Day weekend, let us remember those brave men and women once again—those who have already passed on, and especially those who never left that foreign shore. Their courage continues to inspire as we bask in the relative ease which they helped to ensure.

Protected by one of the most powerful militaries in the world, and with oceans to the east and west, Americans have a security that is unknown elsewhere. Imagine having to live in constantly-tense regions such as the Middle East or Africa, invasion and war constantly at the borders, or even within the nation’s borders, tribal factionalism still rife in so many parts of the world. Imagine if the states—or counties—around your own were constantly threatening battle and invasion—the insecurity and the uncertainty that such would engender. Whatever other concerns we have in this country, worry of military invasion on our home ground is not high on the list. Thus all the more we honor all—military or civilian—who travel abroad to try to increase the security and welfare of our and other nations and peoples.

We who grew up not very long after WWII remember well the old war-era posters and Hollywood movies that were at least partially propagandized against the Germans and the Japanese. The message was that, if the allies lost, we, too, would fall under autocratic regimes that revelled in cruelty and absolute control. Fear—real or imagined—is a most powerful motivator.

Fear is often what drives division between peoples and cultures. We are well aware of the history of racism and religious hatreds in our own nations, but such division exists virtually everywhere—whether between clans, tribes, races, religions, nationalities, or some other identifier. Many find it easier to simply generalize “others” rather than to rationally judge persons by their individual character—the latter being the “dream” of Martin Luther King, Jr.

(By the way, young people, if you’ve never seen a video of his “I Have a Dream” speech, go find one and watch it. It is one of the most iconic and moving speeches of one of the most masterful orators of our—perhaps any—time.)

Yes, racism and other factionalisms still exist; they always will—here, and everywhere. Yet here they are much reduced from even a few decades ago. Having been raised in the south, the changes I've witnessed developing over the years is stark—and heartening. “The other side of the tracks” was a literal reality in my little hometown in my youth. For instance, we had two Catholic churches there, unspoken division but present nonetheless—the “white” and the Hispanic, and that dividing line pretty much existed within each denomination and each town. But now ... few if any care at all, and there’s no expectation to attend the “right” one.

A personal encounter that still haunts me is being in my early twenties driving through the rural deep South and stopping to ask directions of an elderly black man walking along the road. He responded to my questions in a Gone-with-the-Wind-ish "Yes, suh...yes, suh". A bit stunned at such a demeanor, I just mumbled words of thanks, ensuring that with some of my own culturally ingrained "sirs" toward elders were thrown in, and drove on. Yet, I think about that encounter very often even now, so memorable in the sorrow and, frankly, the rage that it gave me. I was in the military at that time; he was one we swore to defend! A citizen...one of US! Did he—even in that late decade—feel retribution if he was not sufficiently servile toward a white man—even one decades younger than himself?

Why does color or religion or culture have to create such barriers to what we have in common—our very humanity, which connects all of us with one another? But even more so the love of God for all persons, which connects all of us inextricably at the deepest—even eternal—levels.

Fortunately, things are much better even than a few decades ago, but—lamentably—there will inevitably be those who revel in division; disdain and division takes little effort, after all, and certainly no justification is needed other than one’s own prejudices. There’s no real need to improve oneself if one is already superior, is there? But such arrogance and insupportable attitude is simply wrong, and for us Christians, sinful. After all, did Christ not die for all people? How are we to despise any person that Jesus loved so much that He died for them? Yeah ... good luck explaining THAT at judgment! One might remember the parable of the rich man and poor Lazarus (Luke 16).

The true Christian knows—and practices—this, knowing that each human being is a child of God. As Christ accepted all, so we, as His disciples, are bound to accept all ... remembering St. Paul: “...There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” (Galatians 3:26-28) And so, as in many venues, here is where we can be lights dispelling the darkness of bigotry—treating all fairly, justly, and kindly. As equals. In fact, does not Christ instruct His disciples to be the “servant of all”? The second great commandment, affirmed by Jesus Himself, is to love our neighbor. And “Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law.” (Romans 13:10)

“...In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another...if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.” (1 John 4:10-12)