



No matter how beautiful the weather is outside, June 6th is still a rather somber day in our collective national story. It is when American forces joined British and Canadian soldiers, as over 150,000 invaded a 50-mile stretch of the Normandy coast in France, a desperate hope to bring an end to the worldwide nightmare known as World War II. And although D-Day ended up instilling that sense of hope for Allied forces, it most certainly came at a cost not just for the thousands who lost their lives, and thousands more wounded or missing altogether, but for the thousands of families and close friends back home, who never got to see their loved ones again. It not only impacted how certain pages in high school history textbooks would be written, but it would alter the story for those mothers and fathers, sisters and brothers, forever.

So, it is rather fitting that this 130th Psalm comes to the forefront this morning: “Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord; O Lord, hear my voice!” To imagine how many of the 150,000 shouted similar words as they rushed upon those hallowed beaches. Or how many prayed the gut-wrenching plea as they waited in the ocean waves, not knowing if they would get out alive? “Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord; O Lord, hear my voice!” Unfortunately, as the years have gone by since June 6, 1944, more and more of the people who were brave enough to take on the near-suicide mission have reached the end of their time here on this earth. Their precious voices gradually fading away.

It was only a couple years ago today, that it was the 75th anniversary of the tragic, but most heroic, turning point. For some of the survivors, June 6, 2019, was the first time they returned to Normandy. Understandably so, they thought it would be too emotional, too horrifying to come back again. And yet, they knew of the persistent reality that more of them, more of their voices are vanishing, and not only does God need to hear their voices, including cries still in the middle of the night, and heart-felt anguish over friends lost from decades before; not just God, but *we* need to hear their voices, too.

So, one of the men who ventured back to France for the 75th anniversary was Jerry Deitch, a survivor of Utah beach. He was 93 when he returned, convinced “he must see where good friends died and revisit the spot by a seawall where he was hit by a piece of shrapnel that left a fist-sized dent in his helmet.” He was 18 at the time, but reportedly said that he felt like he turned 30 in an instant. “Serving in a...combat demolition unit, his job was to clear obstacles...that could slow the Allied advance inland. The shrapnel that dented Deitch’s helmet gave him a concussion [and] he was evacuated...to England. [He said,] ‘I know exactly where I was when I was hit. Exactly the spot. I see it in my mind all the time.’” For much of his life since, Deitch was not willing to talk much about the war, but in recent years he started writing about it. However, perhaps the most fascinating part of him sharing his experience, as he returned to the place that nearly killed him, he said, “It changed my life...It taught me to be very tolerant. God gives us free will; you’ve got to use it.”

And I think about his words with regards to, “Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord!” Again, not just for God to hear their cries, but for us to listen, too. We often wonder what is the best way to honor those who died when it comes to this past week with Memorial Day, or the best living response to those still with us on Veteran’s Day in November, or what should we do knowing what happened on D-Day approaching 80 years ago now. Granted, this is just one veteran’s perspective, but he said that day, “changed [his] life...It taught [him] to be very tolerant. God gives us free will; [we]’ve got to use it.”

And so, one way to consider how best we honor the 150,000 who risked their lives not just for America, or Canada, or Britain, but for the whole world; and not only that, but to honor the God who

hears all the desperate cries and heart-wrenching anguish from the most utter depths of human pain and trauma: that the best way is to do our part in bringing a sense of peace to our own hearts, our homes, our communities, and beyond. Yes, we have our fair share of disagreements, to say the least. But whatever little part we can do in our own corner of the world to not unleash hostility and hatred, so that more of our siblings in Christ do not have to be sent into harm's way; to use our free will not for vengeance, but for grace and compassion.

I have a feeling not only Jerry Deitch would be most grateful, but our Risen Lord as well; the same Risen Lord who gave us the ultimate freedom over sin and death, so that we may be set free to serve with the world-altering love that took on a cross and a tomb. And yes, on this day, we continue to give thanks to the God who did hear the cries of those from nearly 80 years ago on a beachfront, and the God who promises to be with all of us no matter the depth of fear, to usher us into the peace that is meant for the whole world to enjoy. For that Greatest News of all, we most certainly give thanks to God, indeed! Amen.

Source: Leicester, John & Raf Casert (Associated Press), "Chasing Demons: 75 Years On, D-Day Haunts, Drives its Vets." (June 3, 2019)