This incredible account of Jesus’ authority in disposing of the man’s demons is both gripping and powerful on many levels. It is hard to imagine the suffering, anguish and deprivation this man endured in every aspect of his life. His emotional, physical, social, economic and spiritual life was a living hell. He even lived among the dead! He was so depraved and such an outcast that his only companions were dead corpses. His tormented soul caused him to harm his flesh by crudely cutting himself with stones. Satan had metastasized his evil in this man to the extent that it totally possessed him with such a powerful grip that this demon(s) called himself “legion” (one legion could have as many as 1,000 or more warriors), all of whom warred against the man like a flesh/soul-eating cancer. All efforts to constrain these demons were futile. Jesus, with all power in heaven and earth, and with great compassion and mercy, ordered the demons into a herd of 2,000 unclean pigs who, in a sacrificial way, ran off a cliff to their utter demise.

The reaction of this man, now in his “right mind,” was profound. His life had been given back to him. He was saved, reclaimed by God’s mercy and love. He was so grateful that he didn’t just go home but goes to the Decapolis (a region of 10 cities) and tells how much Jesus has done for him. “Everyone marveled.”

In a variety of ways, Jesus continues to cast out demons today. Sometimes it is dramatic while at other times it may be a slow process that takes years. We have given many names to our demons such as PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder), cancer, AIDS, Lupus, Alzheimer’s, psychosis, neurosis, suicidal behavior, phobia, terrorism, bigotry, hatred and others too numerous to mention. All involve suffering, grief, isolation and loss and feel like we are consumed by a...
disease/problem over which we have no control. It’s like a war within ourselves and among ourselves that leads to our demise. God have mercy! By His death and resurrection Jesus has conquered not only Satan’s demons but death too. And, until He comes again, he uses Operation Barnabas people to bind wounds, provide comfort and care for those who grieve and are distressed. Yes, by His love within us, and with the power and courage of faith, Jesus sends us to cast out even the most frightening demons! His Word, spoken from our lips, has power and authority.

Over the centuries, during times of war, men and women in service to our nation have faced some of the most horrific demons that Satan can inflict on people this side of heaven. They died so that future generations could live in our nation with all the rights and freedoms guaranteed by our Constitution. They sacrificed their lives and left grieving families behind. And so, we celebrate Memorial Day.

Since the end of the Civil War, American families have gathered on Memorial Day (also known as Decoration Day) in cemeteries to decorate the graves and picnic on the grounds to honor and remember all those who made the ultimate sacrifice. Many towns held parades. Most families no longer gather in cemeteries, and it seems that there are fewer parades than in years past. However, I sometimes wonder if the true meaning of the holiday is eroding. With this and the lesson above in mind, I offer four suggestions for Operation Barnabas Christian citizens in the celebration of Memorial Day.

First, pray a prayer of thanksgiving for those who sacrificed their lives in service to our nation and their families. They sacrificially stood up against evil and bore the burden of our national freedom. Thank God also for Jesus, who faced all of Satan’s power, freeing us from the power of sin and death through His sacrifice on the cross. Second, “Tell everyone what He has done…” Just as the man who found his right mind after meeting Jesus and was commanded to “Go home to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you,” we also need to tell our personal story of what God has done for us. Jesus asks us to share our mercy story of how He brings us back in relationship with God and with others in our community. Our personal story is powerful because Jesus is in our lives. Others will be strengthened by the sharing of our struggles and how our encounter with our Savior has brought us into the right mind of faith, that is, our relationship with Him. Our story of Jesus’ authority over the demons in our lives makes Him known as a loving Savior full of mercy and grace. Third, tell the story of our nation’s history and the great many sacrifices that were made to ensure the preservation of our freedom. Nearly every family has a story to tell of a friend or family member who sacrificed their life for us. Let us encourage our children, grandchildren, family, friends and neighbors about the real purpose of Memorial Day. May we lead them in a pause of remembrance to honor the sacrifice of our fallen heroes. Finally, let us make every effort to fully exercise and enjoy the freedoms for which they died.

“Go home to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you.”

REPORTS

S-1 Personnel
Roll Call: Gather names and record attendance of members. A time to get to know each other.

S-2 Intelligence
Gather and share information. Provide a report on local units and their deployment schedule; also provide contact information for local military contacts upon request. Identify and assess what is going on in the community concerning veterans and their families.

S-3 Operations and Training
Develop a plan. Draft a listing of possible chapter activities, including veterans celebrations, presentations (as desired and available); develop a strategy to expand outreach into the community. Identify and assign tasks to specific people that include standards and timeframes.

S-4 Logistics
Identify and provide materials for meetings, such as coffee, refreshments, etc., to support the plan.

S-6 Communication
Develop communication strategies to support the plan. Place internal announcements (newsletter/bulletins) as well as provide articles for the local paper.

Photo: Lisa Ferdinando
OUTREACH OPPORTUNITY
FOR OB CONGREGATIONS

“Adopt-a-Chap” is an opportunity for congregations to directly connect with or “adopt” our Synod’s Armed Forces chaplains, active and reserve, and Veteran’s Hospital chaplains, too! It is a program that links congregations with chaplains to promote mutual support and growth. It is a means through which we learn and support each other in military ministry. After a congregation is “matched” with a chaplain by the LCMS Ministry to the Armed Forces (MAF) staff, the congregation and chaplain establish a relationship through regular communication with one another. Congregations will regularly keep the chaplain and his family in prayer and learn about his specialized ministry in the military and VA context. Since he is effectively bringing the Gospel to young adult “millennials,” the congregation might also benefit from the wisdom of his experience. The process begins by a congregation contacting the MAF office (314-996-1337; Alicia.Hinton@lcms.org) and indicating a desire to “adopt-a-chap.” One member of the staff will select/match a chaplain with the congregation, providing contact information. There may be many other opportunities to support and learn from each other in creative ways. No financial commitment or aid is needed or expected. This is the Church working together, encouraging and supporting one another in mission to our men and women in our nation’s Armed Forces and Veteran’s Hospitals.

RECENT AND
UPCOMING EVENTS

APRIL 6, 2019
OB Presentation to
Redford Lutheran Church,
Detroit, Mich.

MAY 6–10, 2019
East Coast Chaplain’s Conference,
Jacksonville, Fla.

JUNE 19–22, 2019
LWML Convention,
Mobile, Ala.

NEED RESOURCES FOR HONORING VETERANS AND SERVICE MEMBERS? Check out the LCMS Ministry to the Armed Forces website (lcms.org/ministry-to-the-armed-forces) for downloadable resources.
The purpose of this section is to highlight some of the Operation Barnabas activities across the U.S. as a way of providing examples of ministry that might be replicated at other congregations and chapters. Hopefully activities such as these might prove to be a catalyst for other means of sharing God’s mercy to military-connected people in our communities. Please share your activities, including pictures, so that others might gain from your experience.

Council Bluffs, Iowa, OB Chapter:
The Operation Barnabas chapter served a meal on February 28 at the local American Legion where SFC Greg Allen Stube (ret.) Special Forces Warrior was the speaker. He was wounded in Afghanistan during Operation Medusa. He sustained wounds that seemed fatal, but instead he survived after 17 surgeries and an 18-month hospital stay.

Pictured here are two of the chapter members working at the Veterans Affairs office in Council Bluffs. Many clothing donations are received, and staff have little time to sort through them, so our chapter has volunteered to help with this project.

Catalina and Faith Lutheran (Catalina and Tucson, Ariz.) Chapters:
Dawn Hawk and Rev. Dr. Michael Moorehouse report: “A very successful Stand Down was held today with about 75 homeless and needy veterans showing up at our table. There were 140 veterans who stayed in the hotel for the first two nights. Eighty resource groups were present to serve the veterans and their families.

The workers from CLC included Paul and Donna Lindberg, Donna’s brother Mark and his wife Diane, Bruce Helenbart, Mike and Laura Calvert, and Russ and Dawn Hawk. Dale and Jayne Schlak from Faith also came to help. The cookies were a real hit and we used them to spread the good news of Jesus’ saving grace. We told them that the cookies were sweet, but Jesus was sweeter and would satisfy them forever. Many of the veterans gave their affirmation. Thirty-two Bibles were handed out, and our group donated six gift cards of $50 each for door prizes. This money was donated by members of CLC for this purpose. The next Stand Down will be held in August. The photo (right) shows a young student who received a cute pair of glasses, our group photo (above), and our resource-laden table (above).”

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LMIGHTY GOD, we give You thanks and praise for the sacrifice of Your Son Jesus Christ, who died for the forgiveness of our sins and for our everlasting life. Infuse us with Your Spirit to enable us to tell our own personal story of deliverance by Jesus from the sinful demons that bind our lives. We thank You for the blessing and privilege of living in these United States of America. Help us never to take for granted our freedoms or the sacrifice of so many that made those freedoms possible. May we honor them by exercising the freedoms and liberties that they preserved for us, most of all, the freedom to worship You in deed and in truth.

In Operation Barnabas, You call us to a ministry of peace and healing through our relationships with our nation’s service members and their families. By Your Spirit, use us to encourage and share the joy of the Good News of Jesus Christ. We give thanks for all who gave their lives in service to our nation as well as those who continue to serve that we might enjoy the freedoms granted in our Constitution. Bless our service members, their families, our nation and its leaders. Grant our political and military leaders with wisdom, strength, courage and kindness to govern our nation in a manner that brings glory to You and serves the people of our country. Let our nation’s leaders be guided by the power of hope that is only in Jesus, that they may govern in humility and compassion, with justice and mercy for all. Move all of us to work together in forging a compassionate and peaceful nation. Into Your hands we commit our spirit! In Jesus’ name, we pray AMEN.

Prayer: Rev. Dr. Gary L. Danielson

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Trinity Lutheran Church in Pine Bluff, Ark.: Quilts of Valor

Rev. Stewart Marshall reports, “On November 18, 2018 at Trinity Lutheran Church in Pine Bluff, Ark., the church celebrated Thanksgiving with their Annual Thanksgiving meal. Following our Thanksgiving meal, we gathered in the sanctuary where the local Quilts of Valor Group ‘Never Forgotten with Honor’ joined us and presented 14 of our 19 members, who are veterans, with a quilt made for each one by a member of the Quilts of Valor. The ceremony started off with the Quilts of Valor presenting the Missing in Action table, where they set the table to remind us of the one who is missing. Trinity’s choir then sang ’O Valiant Hearts’. We then continued with the presentations.’ The video of the presentation may be seen on Trinity’s Facebook page. facebook.com/trinityowr/videos/307640783175720/

Photos: Rev. Dr. Gary L. Danielson

Lutheran Social Ministries of New Jersey: “We Honor Veterans Program”

Jessica Gruesmeyer of Lutheran Social Ministries of NJ offers this press release about Journey Hospice Partners in the establishment of the “We Honor Veterans” program:

• Journey Hospice is pleased to announce its partnership with the We Honor Veterans program. As a partner, the south Jersey-based hospice program will implement ongoing veteran-centered education for their staff and volunteers to help improve the care provided to the veterans they proudly serve.

• On March 14, 2019, Journey sponsored an event at Victoria Manor in Cape May to honor 37 veterans who served in the Armed Forces during

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MEMORIAL DAY

“Let us encourage our children, grandchildren, family, friends and neighbors about the real purpose of Memorial Day. May we lead them in a pause of remembrance to honor the sacrifice of our fallen heroes.”

WWII, the Korean War, Vietnam and the Cold War. Michael Francis, Command Sergeant and Veteran Relations Director from Congressman Van Drew’s office, presented each veteran with a citation certificate. Guests enjoyed the celebration while listening to John Mistler from Gig Masters as he played his bagpipe.

- The first We Honor Veterans Program event at Victoria Manor was a tremendous success. Journey Hospice is eagerly looking forward to sponsoring more programs to honor local veterans. By partnering with this program, Journey’s efforts will help provide care and support to reflect the important contributions made by these men and women. To learn more about We Honor Veterans or to support its efforts, please visit wehonorveterans.org.

About Journey Hospice

Journey Hospice provides support to individuals and their loved ones during an advanced illness, ensuring that every person’s journey of life is allowed to end with dignity, compassion and comfort. As part of Lutheran Social Ministries of New Jersey (LSMNJ) — a mission-driven, statewide not-for-profit organization — Journey is open to all, regardless of religious affiliation or background. To learn more about Journey Hospice, visit journeyhospicenj.org or call 609-380-4302.