

mar 10

civil war letter

"set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm; for love is as strong as death." ss 8:6

the last letter from major sullivan ballou, written to his wife leading up to the battle at first bull run.

headquarters, camp clark  
washington, d.c., july 14, 1861

my very dear wife:

indications are very strong that we shall move in a few days, perhaps to-morrow. lest i should not be able to write you again, i feel impelled to write a few lines, that may fall under your eye when i shall be no more.

our movement may be one of a few days duration and full of pleasure and it may be one of severe conflict and death to me. not my will, but thine, o God be done. if it is necessary that i should fall on the battle-field for any country, i am ready. i have no misgivings about, or lack of confidence in, the cause in which i am engaged, and my courage does not halt or falter. i know how strongly American civilization now leans upon the triumph of government, and how great a debt we owe to those who went before us through the blood and suffering of the revolution, and i am willing, perfectly willing to lay down all my joys in this life to help maintain this government, and to pay that debt.

but, my dear wife, when i know, that with my own joys, i lay down nearly all of yours, and replace them in this life with care and sorrows, when, after having eaten for long years the bitter fruit of orphanage myself, i must offer it, as their only sustenance, to my dear little children, is it weak or dishonorable, while the banner of my purpose floats calmly and proudly in the breeze, that my unbounded love for you, my darling wife and children, should struggle in fierce, though useless, contest with my love of country.

i cannot describe to you my feelings on this calm summer night, when two thousand men are sleeping around me, many of them enjoying the last, perhaps, before that of death, and i, suspicious that death is creeping behind me with his fatal dart, am communing with God, my country and thee.

i have sought most closely and diligently, and often in my breast, for a wrong motive in this hazarding the happiness of those i loved, and i could not find one. a pure love of my country, and of the principles i have often advocated before the people, and "the name of honor, that i love more than i fear death," have called upon me, and i have obeyed.

sarah, my love for you is deathless. it seems to bind me with mighty cables, that nothing but Omnipotence can break; and yet, my love of country comes over me like a strong wind, and bears me irresistibly on with all those chains, to the battlefield. the memories of all the blissful moments i have spent with you come

crowding over me, and i feel most deeply grateful to God and you, that i have enjoyed them so long. and how hard it is for me to give them up, and burn to ashes the hopes of future years, when, God willing, we might still have lived and loved together, and seen our boys grow up to honorable manhood around us.

i know i have but few claims upon divine providence, but something whispers to me, perhaps it is the wafted prayer of my little edgar, that i shall return to my loved ones unharmed. if i do not, my dear sarah, never forget how much i love you, nor that, when my last breath escapes me on the battle-field, it will whisper your name.

forgive my many faults, and the many pains i have caused you. how thoughtless, how foolish i have oftentimes been! how gladly would i wash out with my tears, every little spot upon your happiness, and struggle with all the misfortune of this world, to shield you and my children from harm. but i cannot, i must watch you from the spirit land and hover near you, while you buffet the storms with your precious little freight, and wait with sad patience till we meet to part no more.

but, o sarah, if the dead can come back to this earth, and flit unseen around those they loved, i shall always be near you in the garish day, and the darkest night amidst your happiest scenes and gloomiest hours always, always, and, if the soft breeze fans your cheek, it shall be my breath; or the cool air cools your throbbing temples, it shall be my spirit passing by. sarah, do not mourn me dear; think i am gone, and wait

for me, for we shall meet again.

as for my little boys, they will grow as i have done, and never know a father's love and care. little willie is too young to remember me long, and my blue-eyed edgar will keep my frolics with him among the dimmest memories of his childhood. sarah, i have unlimited confidence in your maternal care, and your development of their characters. tell my two mothers, i call God's blessing upon them. o sarah, i wait for you there! come to me, and lead thither my children.

- sullivan

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i recently came across this letter. it touched me and i thought it might touch you as well. perhaps never since the civil war has our country experienced such division as it does now. Jesus forewarned of it all. nation will rise against nation which, is really ethnos against ethnos. (ethnos being greek for people of the same race or culture.) but this is not a battle against black and white or any other ethnic group. it is a battle between good and evil and that is not something which can be determined by skin color. they both exist in each and God alone can be the dividing line.

it would appear our country is again in great peril. while we must keep our eye on our eternal home, we must not fail to confront what we lies in front of us. no lie is of the truth and some of the stuff going on nowadays would surely be counted as lies; even comical

if it were not so serious or certainly as fiction in a novel.

we have never been perfect but i believe we were the best of what's out there. all truth and justice is being systematically removed from our history and soon, only those old enough with memory enough will remember it. even the comic strips have stricken superman's motto: "truth, justice, the american way."

we who are old enough, will necessarily have to verbally pass truths on to others as history no longer will. that's why one needs scripture in their heart. it too may soon be relegated to memory. if i were judging america now, i would render it a goat nation. i believe the men and women who shed their blood for country would do the same. we are not becoming more free but more deceived.

"let not mercy and truth forsake you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart."

prov 3:3

truth, justice, the american way? no, only God's way can free us. i write this for God, family and country. i love america but i don't love what it is becoming. i do apologize for the length of this daily but i could not conceive of it being given in two or three parts. scripture warns us: "and if a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand." mark 3:25 pray. pray and stand but certainly we all must pray!