

**Prayer of the Cross**  
**By Rev Todd Farnsworth**  
**Romans 8: 12-17**



*So then, brothers and sisters, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh-- 8:13 for if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. 8:14 For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. 8:15 For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, "Abba! Father!" 8:16 it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, 8:17 and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ--if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.*

Although this is not the apostle Paul's earliest letter to the churches in the first century, it is listed as his first letter in the Bible. The letter speaks to a Jewish and Gentile/non-Jewish audience and it makes the case for a church that is embraced by God through Jesus Christ. Paul enforces this kinship of spirit by positing his readers as "children of God."

You will recall that children were the legacy of their father in the first century. The parable of the Prodigal Son lays the strength of relationships out in vivid commentary.

In this letter, Paul amplifies that message by giving the prodigals (us) an abbreviated and passionate prayer, "Abba! Father!" The words are a plea that resonates from our witness of Jesus on the Cross. The words carry the weight of the pain we often bear at the hands of a world that is more cruel than God envisaged.

On this Memorial Day weekend I imagine those words echoing from the lips of Gold Star parents who have lost their children in service to our country. On this Memorial Day weekend I imagine those words gasping from the lips of soldiers around the world as they take their last breaths. “Abba! Father!” Lest we believe (and I don’t think that any of us believe) that American soldiers are the only ones that inherit this prayer from the Cross, I would like to share with you a story I read this week, about a war long ago, fought by a different people, but first...

A look at our somewhat local author! **Ruth Stanley. (slide)**

1873, Ruth Stanley born 1873 in Patchogue, NY

1899, Marries Charles H. Farnam (a lawyer from NYC). Reside in New Haven, CT

1903, Move to Southampton, England



1909, Charles dies from meningitis in Paris

1911, Ruth Stanley Farnam sells the home in Southampton



1914, WW1 begins. Ruth moves to Serbia to assist with the war effort

1915, Ruth volunteers as a nurse in the Serbian army at age 42.

1916, Ruth is made a Sergeant in the Serbian Army and is

present at the  
Battle of Brod



1918, Ruth publishes her autobiographical account of time spent in Serbia,

### A Nation at Bay

In her book A Nation at Bay, Ruth Stanley Farnam writes as an American who witnesses the horrors of WW1 in Serbia. Serbia and WW1 may feel like a long way away from us here in Briarcliff, but Ms. Farnam's words brought me close to the action, the suffering, the grief, of war.

I'd like to share with you some of her observations.

She writes about her introduction to war on page 17 and following. Ruth had been volunteering at a local hospital, under the guidance of Madame Grouitch, the Head Nurse.

*"Where we really must have help is in the operating room," was Madame Grouitch's tentative suggestion. "Someone must be there to wait on the surgeon."*

*The thought made me feel rather queer, but I said, "Let me try." She did. The first case was a pretty bad one, but I made up my mind to do the best I could, and I got through without much trouble.*

*But the next case proved too much for me. We had a man whose head had been broken by a piece of shell and he was, in consequence, completely paralyzed. There was some growth on his back, just by the shoulder, which had to be removed and I had to hold him in my arms to keep him in proper position during the operation. We had no anaesthetics. There was no*

*money with which to buy them. The poor fellow was in a fearful state of nerves as he lay in my arms, screaming, but unable to move a muscle. The feeling of his bare body on my arms, his screams, his breath, the odor of blood and the sound of the knife softly passing through the flesh were at last too much for me. I managed to stand it until the operation was over and then I went into the open air and was deathly sick. Five minutes later I apologized to Dr. Shuler and said I would be braver next time; and though it was a struggle sometimes, I was able to go on from that time without further mishap.*

*At the end of two days I was allowed to dress amputations. I would take off the dressings. Dr. Shuler would look over from his patient on the table and say, "Swab that with number two." I'd do it. Then I would rebandage the stump. The soldier would murmur, "Fala, sestro," (thanks, sister) and hobble off on his crude crutches. Sometimes the tortured nerves of the patient would be too much for him, and he would lay his poor head on my arm and plead, "Polako, sestro," (gently sister) while great beads of sweat would stand out on his forehead. But usually they were so brave that it makes me proud to think that I was allowed to do what I could to help them."*

I confess I don't know exactly how Ms. Farnam came to be in Serbia. As the timeline indicates, she had moved to England, her husband had died, she sold there house and then she was in Serbia. The first 11 pages of her book are lost. Missing. I couldn't find them anywhere in any archive of the book.

What I did discover was that she wrote eloquently about the toll of human loss during war. She understood the sacred nature of the soldier's cries, "Polako sestro," (gently sister) before they died. Ruth writes on...

*"In October, Austria had prepared to cross the river at Belgrade by an irresistibly heavy bombardment, during which they fired fifty thousand shells into the town, their avowed object being to kill as many people as possible and thus create a reign of terror.*

*They also laid a curtain of shell-fire on the roads leading from the town, and hundreds of poor fugitives were killed. Men and women, little children, wounded soldiers who were taken from hospital beds, the gently nurtured wives and daughters of diplomats, bankers and college professors; shopkeepers, Austrian prisoners, servants and all the varied population of a great city fell victims to the merciless fire and lay in heaps upon that Road of Death.*

*The Serbian troops had not replied to this fire, hoping that by refraining the civil population might be spared, and later on, after most strenuously resisting the enemy's advance, had withdrawn from the town. But nothing availed to restrain the implacable enemy, and so he looted, burned, and killed as his nature prompted him.*

*Gallows were set up in the public spaces upon his entrance into the town and wholesale executions followed.*

*By the intervention of the Americans, who had been doing hospital work in the city, these gallows were later removed to less conspicuous spots. The Americans protested to the Austrian military authorities and were able for a time to relieve the appalled and suffering people from the awful sight of their nearest and dearest hanging shamefully before their very windows.*

*In the attack at the frontier and on the town poison gas was used. And this new and diabolical weapon-new at least to the Serbians-was more fatal than all the other methods of warfare combined."*

In his letter to the church in Rome, Paul expresses his understanding of our common humanity in Christ. The prayer, "Abba! Father!" which we recognize from Jesus on the Cross, is a plaintive plea for relief from suffering. It is a hopeful witness to a God who is ready to bring relief in the midst of intense suffering. It is a testimony to the faith in a resurrection victory that is more powerful than any enemy.

On this Memorial Day weekend, we remember the soldiers who died on such crosses.

On this Memorial Day weekend, we hear their prayers from the cross of war, of friendly fire, of despair-laden suicide.

On this Memorial Day weekend, we reflect on the battles they fought on behalf of their loved ones, and as Ruth reminds us, we reflect on the loved ones who were and are also crying out on the roads of war.

*"Those awful roads of November were filled with a procession of women, children, old men and maimed soldiers striving to get away from the sounds of guns--while behind them fought the little groups of devoted men, fought till their weapons fell from their hands, fought still when, wounded, they sank upon the blood-soaked soil of Beloved Serbia, fought to give time for those poor refugees to get a little farther away that perchance they might somewhere find safety.*

*Away in the icy roads leading to Albania, the poor ones struggled on.*

*Mothers with their little ones around them; blinded soldiers led by the gentle hands of young girls, and carrying in their arms sick or half-frozen children; old men, tottering, stumbling falling at last to rise no more; strong and*

*handsome women, haggard now with bitter fear, their danger greater than any other.*

*A child would moan in its mother's arms, and its little life would flicker out. The mother, kneeling beside the tiny form, would take off her great homespun apron that she might leave the loved body decently covered. But the other suffering children, crying at her side, needed the meagre warmth of the ragged garment, so the heartbroken mother with a piteous prayer must gather her little brood about her and, leaving her baby uncovered, go on again.*

*One by one the children would fall by the roadside, pretty to every cruel chance of misery, until at last the poor mother, would be left alone. Death would have been very sweet to her--to the thousands like her who made that awful journey, --but she was of mettle too stern to accept this compromise with Fate. She knew just three shining words, Love, Home, Duty. It was her duty to go on and keep life in her starved and freezing body as long as she could so that if, by some unimagined chance she might come back again; come Home and raise up other children to live in the Beautiful Serbia of her love.*

*Oh, these were soldiers too. Not theirs the reek and riot, the heat and joy of battle. They fought the bitter fight with cold and hunger. Their tired and bleeding feet trod the ways of Gethsemane; the rich and tenderly nurtured side by side with the poor and lowly."*

Ruth went on from these experiences that sound so immediate to the wars we witness today, to receive an honorary position with the Serbian Army, to write her book, *A Nation at Bay*, and to move to Briarcliff Manor, NY!

**1923, Ruth moves to America and buys a house in Briarcliff Manor, NY**

(Luthany House)

1928, Ruth marries a vineyard owner in France, Baron Charles de Luze

1939, WW2 is gearing up. Ruth continues to raise money for Serbian Relief and helps her husband raise funds to sustain a 100 bed hospital in France.

I don't know how she came to be associated with Briarcliff Manor NY. But according to Karen Smith of the Briarcliff Historical Society, Ruth bought a house here on Pleasantville Road in 1923.

The house is just beyond the High School and has been changed quite a bit from when Ruth lived there. Ruth lived in the house part time, splitting her energies between Briarcliff, Sarasota Springs Florida, and France (where her second husband, Baron Charles de Luze owned a vineyard). You can see from the timeline that Ruth continued raising money for the victims of war, and she heeded the prayers of the Cross that she had experienced during her time in Serbia.

I tell you about Ruth today because her story echoes Paul's account of our common kinship with God, and because Ruth was a long-time member of the Briarcliff Congregational Church. Those who might remember her knew her as, The Baroness de Luze and those who don't remember he might recognize her name for this plaque that holds a spot in our sanctuary.



In 1942 Ruth blessed our church with an American flag. This American flag, to be precise. You can tell it's Ruth's because it only has 48 stars.

48 stars of white, like the stripes, signifying pure hearts and dedication to country

48 stars on a field of blue, representing vigilance, perseverance, and justice. Ideals our men and women continue to lift up today.

48 stars above a sea of red stripes that speak to hardiness and valor; the sacrifice of blood by those who serve our country, by those whose dying words are the prayer of the Cross, in any language. *When we cry, "Abba! Father!" 8:16 it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, 8:17 and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ--if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.*

*"Fala, sestro. Polako, sestro. Abba! Father! "*

Even in the midst of inhumanity to one another, Jesus holds his children together. May we remember our kinship with those who are suffering this weekend. In Jesus' name. Amen.