

Who's Watching?

By Sheila Johnson

Since 1948, the 3rd US Infantry Regiment, Company E (aka "Old Guard"), has guarded the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier year-round, for 24 hours a day—even in inclement weather. Six Sentinels (tomb guards) voluntarily watch over the tomb in 8-hour shifts, changing the Guard every hour on the hour. These elite women and men possess valor, live with high standards, and exhibit strong character. The Sentinels are required to memorize the location of the graves of approximately 300 soldiers who lost their lives in battle, and were buried at that site beginning in the 1950's.

The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier is located near the Arlington National Cemetery in Fort Meyer, Virginia. People come from around the world to watch the elaborate, synchronized Changing of the Guard. My father told me about the Changing of the Guard in my teen years, and it's been something I've wanted to see for myself for many years, and maybe one day I will.

As we experience 2020, we see the "invisible" enemy (COVID 19) paired with an ancient visible enemy (racism) claim innocent lives, overcrowd hospitals, overwork healthcare workers, incite violence, change our global economy, increase homicides and suicides, bankrupt family life as we knew it, and push the phrase "New Normal." I am convinced there is no New Normal; there is only Change.

Metaphorically, where is the "Old Guard" stationed and how often will the shift change? Is it possible for the elite Sentinels to stand watch over God's people, the Unknown Soldiers, hour by hour while we fight our daily battles of depression, addictions, loneliness, homelessness, mental illness, food disparity, COVID 19, racism, and all of the other "isms"?

My Beloved, you and I are both the Sentinel and the Unknown Soldier. We are culturally, emotionally, spiritually, economically, and gender different, and are all made in the image of God. We will become discouraged, but we cannot be dislodged from our posts—no matter the weather. We must be Sentinels with valor, high standards, and strong character. We are Unknown Soldiers who fight immeasurable battles every day, and we will all die without the world knowing how hard we fought, how many tears we shed, how many times our hearts have been broken, how many graves we've dug, or how much love we've given and not received.

We, the Unknown Soldier and the Sentinel who are called by God's name, must humble ourselves, pray, and seek God's face, turn from our wicked ways. Then God will hear from heaven, and will forgive our sins and heal our land (2 Chronicles 7:14—improvised).

It's something I've wanted to see for myself, and maybe one day I will. Who's watching?