

"We Remember"

Rev. Ian K. Johnston

St. John's Presbyterian Church

November 11, 2018

Cornwall, ON

I have a poem I clipped from a newspaper a few years ago. I kept it in my file for several years. It is a poem that spoke to me then and perhaps because of my avocation, continues to touch me even now.

"Lest We Forget"*Remember Me*

The bugle called it's mournful song,
 We have been dead forever so long.
 Voices cried out in terror and pain
 my loved ones I'll see never again.
 Was it all for naught?
 Let the last words always be,
 Remember me, Remember me.

The battles fought were fierce and hard.
 Victories won were often marred
 by loss of friends, and sometimes kin
 to make the foe pay for it's sin.
 Our glorious flag was often unfurled
 in those devastated countries across the world.
 To those who paid the fee,
 Remember me, Remember me.

The war is long over now,
 my buddies will tell you how
 the supreme price we paid
 to let your world be remade.
 The only thing we would plea,
 Remember me, Remember me.

Retired Presbyterian Air Force Padre, Lt. Col. Bill McClellan, wrote an article for the PCC, published in November 1992. He suggested that Remembrance Day should also be called, *Evaluation Day*. He has always had a concern about the conflict in the "me" generation and the generation that is grounded in, "my rights." He refers Christians to the teaching of Jesus in Mark 8: 34,35: *If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake and for the sake of the gospel, will save it.* November 11 is the day when we annually honour the memory of those who, for us, gave up their right to live.

We must remember. If we do not, the sacrifice of those 100,000 Canadian lives will be meaningless. They died for us, for their homes and families and friends; for a collection of traditions they cherished and a future they believed in; they died for Canadians and for Canada. The meaning of their sacrifice rests with our collective national consciousness; our future is their monument. As Canadians

we often take for granted our current way of life, our freedom to participate in cultural and political events, and our right to live under a government of our choice. Those who died believed that, *without freedom there can be no enduring peace and without peace, no enduring freedom*. Those men and women had faith in the future and by their acts gave us the will to preserve peace for all time. On Remembrance Day, we remember and we evaluate. There are many stories and records and it is important that we recognize the many who endured the hardships and the fear so that we may live in peace. There are records that stun us even by today's calculations. Victory had its cost at Vimy Ridge in April 1917 with more than 10,000 casualties in six days. 1939-1945, in WW II, 45,000 gave their lives. In 1941, 290 died in the unsuccessful defense of Hong Kong. 516 died in Korea and 1,558 severely wounded. Since then Canadians have seen peacekeeping and peace making operations deployed around the globe. In recent years our news reports were all too frequently reporting the death or injury of another Canadian soldier in the Afghanistan conflict.

War has many faces but few of them are pleasant. Through knowledge of realities, we may work to prevent them happening again, but we cannot for a moment forget those who gave us the freedoms we have today. On November 11th, we remember. The poppy worn as the flower of remembrance is a reminder of the blood-red flower that still grows on the sites of battles waged in France and Belgium. In the spring of 1915, Dr. John McRae from Guelph, in the middle of the bloodshed paused and penned that now infamous poem, *In Flanders' Fields*. The flowers and the larks serve as reminders of nature's ability to withstand the destructive elements of man made destruction and a symbol of hope in a time of human despair.

Today in our worship we admit that 2 minutes is scarcely enough time for thought and reflection or evaluation. But we are called to ponder from the depths of inner selves, what does it mean that they gave their lives for us? For some, the remembrance is of comrades long departed; young men and women who never came home again; those who returned home with broken bodies; the youthful who went with eager patriotic thoughts; the anguish of parents, spouses, and children. I think it is important that we remember that they died to preserve a way of life, the down to earth basic traditions of being Canadian, the freedoms we currently enjoy which include the freedom to celebrate or reject religious beliefs and values. And we remember that the silence is for peace.

One day a year we pay homage to those who died in the service of our country – their country. We remember their courage and their devotion to ideals. We wear poppies, attend special services, visit memorials and for one quiet moment, remember why we too must work for and cherish peace every day of the year. We must come seeking a renewed meaning and understandings of the words of Scripture, Blessed are *the peacemakers*.

A few years ago, Barbara Woodruff, formerly of our GA Office in Toronto, wrote an article in one of our denomination's publications:

*At this Time of Remembrance we are
torn in many directions.*

Truly grateful for those who gave

*their lives in battle,
we are sure that they are numbered
among the host of witnesses
that crowd the throne of God. And yet...*

*As followers of the Prince of Peace
we dare not glorify war.
We live at a point of tension
not wanting to betray the one who died for us,
not wanting to encourage further fighting. And yet...*

*We look around the world and see that
war abounds
and people die and lives are torn
and strewn about without a thought,
Each side is fighting for a cause they think is just.
Are we naive to strive for peace? And yet...*

*O Prince of Peace, we call on you today
to enter once again this world of strife.
Give us the strength to live with our realities.
Sustain our hope in spite of our 'And yet...'
Accept our thanks for sacrifices made
and point us ever toward a better day. Amen*

Gordon Lane, contemplating the state of the world after the first Gulf War wrote a revised version of, *In Flanders' Fields*.

*In Flanders' Fields, as time goes by
Where poppies grow and poppies die,
Where many paid the sacrifice
In useless war, not once but twice
...Yet war goes on.*

*For men in power, men of greed
They thrive upon a driving need
To stockpile deadly overkill
And think of those who paid the bill,
...One day a year.*

*One day a year to kneel and pray
"For what is really safe today?"
We've broken faith with those who died
Oh how this war-mad world has lied
To those who lie in Flanders' Fields.*

We will remember them!

*They shall grow not old,
As we that are left grow old;
Age shall not weary them,
nor the years condemn.*

*At the going down of the sun
and in the morning,*

We will remember them. For the Fallen [Laurence Binyon]

PRAYER: Lord, we are called to go into all the world to tell the Good News. Let us go joyfully, filled with the Spirit that we know no fear or discouragement. Never let us give up on this task, which is the only charge you ever gave us. Let us chase the modern chariots to search out all those who need to hear your forgiveness and salvation. Let us open our hearts to all people that we may be able to accept and love them as sisters and brothers in Jesus Christ, that we may all be worthy of your great sacrifice on the Tree in the midst of war torn country of occupation with foreign soldiers standing around. Because of our death may we not fear the sting of death again. Help us to remember and may your Spirit guide us so we too may become peace makers. In Jesus' name, Amen.