

A Call to Remember

I think Remembrance Sunday is a tremendously important time on the annual calendar year – a time when we stop to remember the veterans.

I wasn't around during the Second World War – But I remember the stories my father told us as children, of his experience in the war. He fought in the second World War for England, as Jamaica was and still is a Commonwealth territory of England. He proudly fought alongside fellow RAF (Royal Air Force) soldiers.

He talked a lot about the ravages of war, and how lives seemed, somehow insignificant, as soldiers died, and how it stressed him. While he didn't suffer with PTSD, he knew of many that did.

I do remember him once telling me how he was walking through a field in single column one day. And an enemy shell fell on an English soldier behind him. The man simply ceased to exist – some mother's son for whom the family would grieve.

He recalls another fellow, who, the loss of his hair scarred him for life – leaving him with a very low self worth.

Many did not make it back home. But dad was one of the lucky ones – he survived.

Today we recall the millions of servicemen and women who gave their lives in both World Wars so that we might enjoy peace today.

And we also need to remember that there have been other conflicts since then – the Korean War, the Falkland War and the two gulf Wars, war in Afghanistan, war in Iraq, etc. And there are some continuing today – Syria, Ukraine, Yemen, and Israel, Lebanon, Russia and Iran.

The whole of the 20th and 21st have been marked by stories of conflict, and it's easy to think of it superficially until it affects us personally. For those who have such a personal experience it was traumatic, whether involved in military conflict or as civilians subjected to military occupation, or worse - as homeless evacuees.

Every Remembrance Day anniversary we focus on the freedom gained, with emphasis on the debt of gratitude owed to those who made the longed-for freedom possible and attempts at peace.

The ability to remember is a wonderful gift that God has given to humanity. Some of our memories are happy and we can recall wonderful experiences.

But some of our memories are sad and we may weep as we remember them.

Some are hilarious:

The story is told of an older couple who had trouble remembering common, day-to-day things. They both decided that they would write down requests the other had, and so try to avoid forgetting things. One evening the wife asked if the husband would like anything. He replied, "Yes. I'd like a large ice-cream sundae with chocolate ice cream, whipped cream and a cherry on top."

The wife started off for the kitchen and the husband shouted after her, "Aren't you going to write it down?" "Don't be silly," she hollered back, "I'm going to fix it right now. I won't forget."

She was gone for quite some time. When she finally returned, she set down in front of him a large plate of hashbrowns, eggs, bacon, and a glass of orange juice. He took a look and said, "I knew you should have written it down! You forgot the toast!"

Even though the Second World War ended 79 years ago it is important that we remember that there are many who still bear the scars of war today. Both the individuals and their families.

And it is good for us to remember those who have fought for their country, to support them and to pray for them.

So today is a day when we pause to say "Thank you" to all those who made the sacrifice that we can gather here today in peace and freedom.

We have read out the names this morning of those connected with this church who have served and have now died. But we must not forget those who are still suffering as a result of continued wars.

And may I commend to you to offer support to any organization working to alleviate the suffering among ex servicemen and women, like the Royal Canadian Legion.

So, as we gather this morning, these thoughts of sacrifice should bring us back to the ultimate sacrifice that Jesus made for us all on the battlefield of Calvary.

St. John put it well when he said:

Greater love has no one than this, that one lays down his life for his friends
(John 15:13)

Jesus gave his life not only for his friends but also for his enemies. The sacrifice was made for all humanity.

As God, Jesus had no need to experience human suffering, but he did for all humanity.

Humanity's evil – what we call sin – has always separated us from God. But Jesus died to reconcile us to God, by dying in our place – the Perfect One for imperfect creatures.

Jesus reconciled humanity to God, through dying on the Cross. This reconciliation is a gift that we can receive simply by asking Christ to come into our lives. As John writes:

“But as many as received him, to them he gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name.” John 1:12

The former Bishop of Birmingham, Bishop J L Wilson, who was a Japanese prisoner of war in the Second War recommended three thoughts for us all to carry in our hearts on Remembrance Sunday. I want to close by offering them.

These are:

- That we should be thankful for the sacrifice of others
- That we should be dedicated to work for peace and justice in the world
- That we should be sorry for human sin and evil.

Perhaps I can add a fourth –

That we should treat each others as brothers and sisters, as we **Reflect, Respect and Remember!**

In the name of the Trinity.

Amen!