

SERMON
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“Lest We Forget”

November 11, 2018

Ephesians 6:10-17

Remembrance Day

100 years ago, today, an armistice was signed to end World War One. Over the last 4 years, a global commemoration called “The World Remembers” has been displaying the names of all those that served and lost their lives during 1914-1918. But the names are not just Canadian men and women; the names are men and women from all nations, on both sides. For the first time in history, the goal is that we will not only remember, but we will honor shared histories.

But, what do we remember?

Is it the names of the 66,000 Canadians that died? This year, more than ever, there has been a movement to give each of those names an identity. To recognise them as someone’s son, daughter, husband, wife, or brother. Pictures of the men and women are displayed in “The World Remembers” multi media presentations at various locations. You can read their stories, their journals, their letters home. Letters like that written by Captain Talbot Papineau on October, 1917.¹

Dearest Mother,

After all I have been able to write you again before going over. We have been fortunate so far and all things are cheerful. I have even shaved this morning in a little dirty water. I was delighted last night to get two letters from you and a box of candy which I have actually carried with me and have enjoyed. It was a cold night and I slept only about one hour. Also, a noisy night, I can assure you, and the earth full of vibrations.

I hope by the same mail you receive another letter from me to say all is successfully over. But of course, it may be difficult or impossible to write for a few days so don't worry.

There seems so little to say when if only I knew what was to happen, I might want to say so much. These would be poor letters to have as last ones, but you must know with what a world of love they are written. Always remember that I could not love thee so well, or you love me, did I not love honour more. You have given me courage and strength to go very happily and cheerfully into the good fight. Love to all, and a big hug for thee, my dear brave little mother.

Talbot Papineau

¹ “A Terrible Beauty: The Art of Canada at War” by Heather Robertson

What do we remember?

Is it the sense of loss and grief that was experienced by so many. Soldiers on the front line, in the middle of action, frequently saw their best friends killed around them, but had not chance to mourn their loss. Almost every town lost their young to war. Mothers and Fathers waited at home for news of loved ones. Families dreaded receiving the official telegram.

Nov. 5, 1917

Mrs. L. J. Papineau, Dear Madam:

In confirmation of my telegram to you of yesterday's date I regret exceedingly to inform you that an official report has been received to the effect that Capt. A/Major T.M. Papineau, was killed in action on October 30, 1917.

Yours Truly, Lieut. J M Knowles.

What do we remember?

Is it the terrible, gruesome images of the war? It has often been described as the bloodiest war. In a new book by Tim Cook called *The Secret History of Soldiers*, he writes about the horror and heroism of the front-line soldiers. He uses soldiers' personal journals to vividly describe the revulsion they experienced, like those recorded by 20 year old sniper Jim Broomhead of the 46th Battalion:

"I got my first glimpse of death and its stench at Poziers. The dead had not been removed, and they were piled three deep. What an awful sight! God forbid anybody from seeing what I saw. Our barbed wire was fairly well intact, but hung full of dead Canadians and Germans, like birds on telephone wires. The parapet had been kept built up, but you couldn't avoid the arms and legs that were sticking out."

What do we remember?

Is it the desire for peace? So many were willing to serve their country, and sacrifice their lives at war, not because they enjoyed the gruesomeness of war, not because they wanted to kill the enemy, not out of hatred, but because they believed in freedom and peace. The war was regarded as a crusade to liberate democratic nations and defend them against military oppression. 100 Years later, we sometimes struggle with the nobility of this cause. We sometimes question if it was really worth it? A vigorous peace movement arose in Canada, as in many other countries, that questioned the use of war. The phrase "The War to End All Wars" was invoked to suggest that the Great War had been so terrible that no right-minded, God fearing nation would ever engage in such carnage again. That peace would reign.

Sadly, we know now that this war did put an end to all wars. There have been countless wars fought since then, and wars continue to be fought today. Many still live under oppressive regimes, and long for freedom. But let us honor those that gave their lives 100 years ago, by remembering what it is they fought for.

What do we remember?

Let us remember the desire for peace and freedom. Because when we live in world where there is no peace, then death has victory. When we live in a world where we allow hate and evil to reign, then we are not honoring those that gave and continue to give their lives for freedom. In our scripture today, we are called to join those that we remember today – we are called to be soldiers and put on our armour of God – to fight against the powers of darkness and the forces of evil. Paul’s letter to the Ephesians is full of militaristic images – it reminds us to stand steadfast with the belt of truth buckled around our waist, the breastplate of righteousness, the shield of faith, and most importantly, the sword of the Spirit of God. As people of faith, we are called to join those that have gone before us, and stand up for justice and fight for freedom. And we are called to continue to reach out and share God’s Spirit of love, peace, and justice.

I want to leave you with the words from a notebook that was picked up in battle at Somme, and handed to the chaplain. Its pages were thick with the life blood of the owner. Through the blood and the mud the chaplain deciphered these last words written in a hurried and wavering hand: *“Got it in the neck – find pay book and will at record office – remember, God is good. God is love. God bless you”*

Let us please stand for our Act of Remembrance and remain standing for 2 minutes of silence.

One: At the going down of the sun, and in the morning, we will remember them

ALL: We will remember them.

Last post . 2 minutes. Reveille.

One: They were young, as we are young,
They served, giving freely of themselves.
To them, we pledge, amid the winds of time,
To carry their torch and never forget.
We will remember them.

ALL: We will remember them.

Please be seated.

I invite Helen to come forward and lay a wreath in honor of all those that have served and continue to serve for peace and freedom.

Let us now take a time for reflection, and a chance to respond to the message today. A video will be played, followed by the introit. I invite you all to silently come and pin your poppy into the cross. As people of faith, this symbol represents Christ, the Prince of Peace; he came to show us the way to God’s reign of love, peace and justice. As you pin your poppy on the cross, I encourage each of you to silently make a commitment to continue the war for peace and freedom, and think about what you can do through your own words and actions. If you wish to join in with the introit the words will be on the screen.