

Sermon for 12.11.17 Remembrance Day

At 11 am on 11 November 1918 the guns of the Western Front fell silent after more than four years continuous warfare. The 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month attained a special significance in the post-war years. The moment when hostilities ceased on the Western Front became universally associated with the remembrance of those who had died in the war. This first modern world conflict had brought about the mobilization of over 70 million people and left between 9 and 13 million dead, perhaps as many as one-third of them with no known grave. The allied nations chose this day and time for the commemoration of their war dead and called it Armistice Day. After the Second World War this was changed to Remembrance Day.

Today we focus not so much on the broad picture of death, terror and destruction of war. But rather we focus more personally on remembering in thought and prayer the individuals who fought in wars, those who are still involved and the ministry of chaplains in war and peace keeping mission.

The stories in the readings today carry this same theme of personal involvement and speak in terms of choice, love and personal responsibility as followers of Christ.

In the first reading from Joshua, the story describes what we might call “crunch time” for the ancient Hebrews. In the new land which they had recently occupied, Joshua asked them to choose which God they were going to follow.

The God who led their father Abraham through the land of Canaan or the other gods beyond the Euphrates River. They had to make a decision and as the reading tells us they chose the God of Abraham over all other gods and a covenant was made.

Today's Psalm (78) confirms this choice and sing out in faithfulness and loyalty. *We will tell the glorious deeds of the lord, the wonders his has done.*

In the letter to the Thessalonians, Paul speaks in personal terms and urges the followers of Christ to not only love their brothers and sisters, but to live in that love in a way that would distinguish them from others.

Love of fellow believers is to be a hallmark of their existence as Christian in the world. Paul urges them to aspire to live quietly, to mind their own affairs, and to work with their hands as they had been directed, so that they may behave properly towards outsiders and be dependent on no one.

Now self-sufficiency in this context is an expression of concern for others- in terms of not wanting to burden others- rather than an expression of independence and autonomy.

The imagery Paul preaches about the Parousia (the end time when Christ returns) was to encourage hopefulness.

This was a time when they thought the return of Christ was imminent. It was going to happen soon.

Paul provides them with an image and understanding that helped them wait in hope. Outsiders may not hope but Christians are expected to be a hopeful people.

In the gospel passage we hear the parable of the ten bridesmaids. The ten bridesmaids represent expectant believers.

The wisdom in question in the parable is a practical wisdom about salvation. Absolute vigilance is not so much the point here as readiness.

They should remain ready. Their love for God should not grow cold as they await him.

Love and goodness is represented by the oil - some have enough, but - and this is the main point here - it is not transferable to those who do not. Others can help, but readiness to accept God's presence, God's salvation - is ultimately an act of personal responsibility.

No one can do it for another.

Together the readings speak about *a crunch time*, when choice has to be made about the God we worship and follow.

And in our era this is relevant for, as I said last Sunday, faith in the Christian God is becoming more and more foreign to the way of life in the world in which we live.

In this age, surrender and openness to God may well be construed as a *cop out* or even a *weakness* in character – and there are many gods ready to lure one away from the true and living God – the god of technology, the god of sport - the god of material wealth– to name a few.

The readings speak about *living* in Christian love for each other, encouraging each other and having that love flow out into community.

They speak about living a life in readiness to receive God, and being aware of the danger that our love for God can grow cold via many different influences as we await the return of Christ.

The readings today do not speak in terms of viewing or living our faith from afar. They speak rather in terms of personal choice, faithfulness and loyalty to that choice through love, encouragement and personal responsibility in our Christian life.

May we all encourage and love each other in this life in Christ.

And that brings me now to the Looby family and friends who are with us today. Angie and Marcus have made their choice and they bring Isaac for baptism into the Christian family.

The Lord be with you.