

Sermon for 12.11.16 Defense Sunday

From the Australian war memorial web site I share with you these words: At 11 am on 11 November 1918 the guns of the Western Front fell silent after more than four years continuous warfare. The allied armies had driven the German invaders back, having inflicted heavy defeats upon them over the preceding four months. In November the Germans called for an armistice (suspension of fighting) in order to secure a peace settlement. They accepted allied terms that amounted to unconditional surrender.

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. *(End of the web site address)*

Today we continue in that tradition as we not only commemorate those who died in past conflicts, but we also think of our Defence Force members presently serving on active operations in various parts of the world. Defence Sunday is also an opportunity for the whole church to prayerfully support the ministry and mission of the Anglican clergy serving as military chaplains, the Anglican laity and their families who serve in the Australian Defence Force, as well as for the wounded and the grieving. And in our parish family we uphold our serving member and family today.

At this time of remembrance our thoughts are centred on sacrifice, love, faith and hope and for a better future. There are many stories about soldiers in combat who were strengthened through their faith to make sacrifices in the hope that they could help others. And today I'd like to share three stories with you.

Alan Broadribb a young Christian enlisted as a horse handler and driver in world war one. He was in active service on the western front and he constantly prayed for the wounded and for his horses as he led them through muddy trenches to pick up the wounded.

Throughout his service he kept two things close to him, his bible and his horses. His prayer: *O god protect me and protect my horses in the name of the one who was born in a stable.*

Then there is the story of Desmond Doss the seventh day Adventist in the 2nd world war who, because of his Christian beliefs refused to carry a weapon. Doss volunteered as a medic and was at the battle of Okinawa in the pacific war. Doss ended up rescuing over 75 soldiers at Hacksaw Ridge, and because of his bravery, was awarded the [Medal of Honor](#) by Congress, and this was the first time in history that this medal was given to a conscientious objector.

You may know that there is a movie about this recently released.

And then the story of Chaplain Charles Wesley where, in the hostile hot and dusty desert of Afghanistan prayed for the men the day before they set out to transverse a passage that was treacherous terrain and laden with improvised explosive devices. Chaplain Wesley turned to the set reading, psalm 31. White light was forbidden and he read using a dim green L.e.d light. He read the opening verses that were wonderfully appropriate, full of images of God's protection – "I come to you, Lord, for protection...be my mighty rock and the fortress where I am. Then in verse 4 "Free me from the trap that is set for me and keep me safe."

Chaplain Wesley stopped at these words. He felt the word stir in his soul. He looked up at the faces of the soldiers who were with him. The dim green light cast a strange glow on them. Their faces were like his were stunned. God had spoken to them, strongly and plainly. Even and especially in the midst of a strange and hostile land, God was with them, assuring them, and speaking to them.

These are the stories, (and they are only a snippet of a much larger collage) that, in a way, give flesh to our Christian faith and take it beyond simply words of doctrine. These are the stories that make war very personal, because we encounter men and women and the shining light of faith, sacrifice, love, and hope that we can relate to.

Today we hear these virtues in the readings and in the gospel we hear words of loving intimacy and union between ourselves and each other and between ourselves and God. *As the father has loved me so I have loved you. Abide in my love. I do not call you servants any more you are my friends.* ..No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for ones friends. Jesus refers to all sacrificial love in these words, yet his sacrifice for the world is what all sacrificial love emanates from – and it is this that becomes present to us in the memorial within the Eucharist.

When the priest holds the host up and says "take eat this is body given for you do this in remembrance of me, we do more than simply remember what he has done.

We do more than recall his life death and resurrection. Our expression of that first Easter event is limited here by language. The word "remembrance "is the one we use because there is no word in the English language that describes the concept that takes place here.

The Greek word "Anamnesis" (and you may well have heard this word before) conveys a deeper meaning. It speaks about the fuller concept of remembering the past, being in the present and looking ahead to the future.

The concept of Anamnesis looks back to the events of Christ's life, death and resurrection; it takes in the present, as we are nourished and transformed as the body of Christ, and it looks to the future, as we anticipate the fulfillment of the Kingdom that is to come.

Every Eucharist we partake and become the fruit of the one true sacrifice of Jesus Christ for the one and for the many. In faith we look in hope for the world. In faith we accept the eternal sacrifice of Jesus Christ that will ultimately bring all other sacrifices to an end.

The Lord be with you.

