

Scripture

Deuteronomy 8:11-20

11 Take care that you do not forget the Lord your God, by failing to keep his commandments, his ordinances, and his statutes, which I am commanding you today.

12 When you have eaten your fill and have built fine houses and live in them, 13 and when your herds and flocks have multiplied, and your silver and gold is multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied, 14 then do not exalt yourself, forgetting the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, 15 who led you through the great and terrible wilderness, an arid wasteland with poisonous snakes and scorpions. He made water flow for you from flint rock, 16 and fed you in the wilderness with manna that your ancestors did not know, to humble you and to test you, and in the end to do you good.

17 Do not say to yourself, "My power and the might of my own hand have gotten me this wealth." 18 But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth, so that he may confirm his covenant that he swore to your ancestors, as he is doing today. 19 If you do forget the Lord your God and follow other gods to serve and worship them, I solemnly warn you today that you shall surely perish. 20 Like the nations that the Lord is destroying before you, so shall you perish, because you would not obey the voice of the Lord your God.

Psalms 91

Assurance of God's Protection

1 You who live in the shelter of the Most High,
who abide in the shadow of the Almighty,
2 will say to the Lord, "My refuge and my fortress;
my God, in whom I trust."

3 For he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler
and from the deadly pestilence;
4 he will cover you with his pinions,
and under his wings you will find refuge;
his faithfulness is a shield and buckler.

5 You will not fear the terror of the night,
or the arrow that flies by day,
6 or the pestilence that stalks in darkness,
or the destruction that wastes at noonday.

7 A thousand may fall at your side,
ten thousand at your right hand,
but it will not come near you.

8 You will only look with your eyes
and see the punishment of the wicked.

9 Because you have made the Lord your refuge,
the Most High your dwelling place,
10 no evil shall befall you,
no scourge come near your tent.

11 For he will command his angels concerning you
to guard you in all your ways.

12 On their hands they will bear you up,
so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.

13 You will tread on the lion and the adder,
the young lion and the serpent you will trample under foot.

14 Those who love me, I will deliver;
I will protect those who know my name.

15 When they call to me, I will answer them;
I will be with them in trouble,
I will rescue them and honor them.

16 With long life I will satisfy them,
and show them my salvation.

This is the word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Sermon – Jesus, remember me

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be pleasing to you, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer.

Today is Remembrance Day. Many of us have been wearing poppies during the last couple of weeks, and we have much to do today to mark this occasion. After our worship service here all of us are welcome to head down to the cenotaph for the memorial service there. This evening St Pauls will be participating in the bells of peace – our church bells will ring out with many others across the city and across the country to mark the 100th year since the armistice that ended the first great war. As the bells fall silent, Bruce Murray will be the lone piper in the square, bringing the ceremony to a close.

I have to admit that I have some trouble with how to properly recognize Remembrance Day in the church – in too many ways this day is used to glorify war, and our wars go against the message of reconciliation that Christ brought to us. Christ was a non-violent resister – it is theologically very difficult to invoke Christ while taking up arms.

So, right from the start I'd like to separate the act of war from the people who lived and died during war – the people that we remember today.

War only leads to more war. This century and the last were marked by wars on a scale never seen before, and it shows little sign of abating. In fact, in many ways it's been the same conflict for one hundred years.

World War I began with the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo more than one hundred years ago. There were plenty of events that led up to this event – the war wasn't caused by this assassination alone, but it was the trigger.

Following the defeat of Germany, the treaty of Versailles was drafted containing the War Guilt clause that made Germany financially responsible for all war damages. This punitive treaty essentially guaranteed that Germany would again go to war, which they eventually did. The second World War was a direct result of unresolved issues from the first World War.

Following the first world war a number of nation states were created in the Middle East in territories formerly of the Ottoman empire that were held by Britain and France. Countries were created by the British with little or no regard to ethnic identities or historical relationships; families were chosen and put into power who would be friendly to western interests.

Political boundaries were drawn arbitrarily; peoples who considered themselves as one were separated by borders, cultures that traditionally did not get along were lumped together creating minorities forced to live under the domination of their enemies. It is not wonder that the Middle East is so unstable – war between Israel and their Arab neighbours; war between

Iraq and Iran; Iraq and Kuwait; the Gulf Wars; the Afghanistan war; the Kurds against Turkey, Syria, and Iraq; Saudi Arabia in Yemen, ISIS – the list just goes on and on.

The point here is that all of these conflicts stem from earlier conflicts. War begets war – it doesn't solve anything. Jesus' warning as he was arrested was 'Put your sword back in its place, for all who draw the sword will die by the sword.'

This is not to say that we don't stand against those who seek to conquer and destroy – nor do I wish to belittle any of the sacrifices made in times of war – but my point is simply this – war is not to be glorified, nor is it to be celebrated. In our present culture, which seems to always be on a war footing, we need to be reminded of this. There may be times that we have to fight to defend ourselves or others, but let's not delude ourselves that war leads to peace.

There is an African proverb that says when elephants fight it is the grass that suffers. Countries go to war. People are the ones who suffer. Today, we remember the people. We remember those who lived through the horror and still bear the scars. We remember those who died, we remember their pain and their suffering. We remember those who lost family members, who had to pick up the pieces of their shattered lives. We remember the victims, those who were living in the wrong place at the wrong time while others fought over their lands and resources. We remember those left homeless, and even stateless when all was done. We remember.

By remembering the past we will hopefully learn from our mistakes and not repeat them.

Remembering what war is like, not war as we see it on tv, but war as experienced by men and women who were actually there, will hopefully make us want to turn away from war and embrace peace whenever possible.

Remembering honors those people caught up in wars – all the people. The ones who didn't come home and the ones who came home broken. This year's Silver Cross mother lost her son to suicide caused by PTSD. Not everyone who comes home from war is ok. Many came home physically whole but with scars inside.

There are also the ones who didn't fight but contributed to the effort through taking on jobs in factories, rationing, fundraising. And we also remember those who were not soldiers, but still paid the price of war, the civilian victims of war. Remembering these people honors them, gives their sacrifice meaning, and that is important.

But there is another reason for remembering, and this I think is the most important one. Remembering gives us identity. Remembering tells us who we are.

In the bible, relearning who the people were through remembering was an important part of any major announcement. In Deuteronomy, before the Israelites attempted to take over the land that God had promised them, Moses gave them the 'Remember well what the Lord your God did' speech. (Deut. 7:18)

This is a similar speech to the one Moses gave them before he handed down the law. 'Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the Lord your God redeemed you from there'. (Deut 24:18)

The New Testament is no different. In Ephesians Paul writes 'Remember that in the past you were without Christ. You were not citizens of Israel, and you had no part in the agreements with the promise that God made to his people. You had no hope and you did not know God. But now in Christ Jesus, you who were far away from God are brought near through the blood of Christ's death.'

We all live within a narrative; we are part of a story that is much bigger than each of us. We are part of the stories of our families, our townships, our countries. Most importantly we are part of the story of God's act of creation. Every time we tell those stories to ourselves again, we are reminding ourselves of who we are. This is why Moses and the other leaders made sure they told their histories whenever there was a major event coming.

I read a funeral sermon once and in it was a story about a daughter who came to her father as he lay dying, asking for advice. I can't remember exactly what the situation was she was asking about – I think it was something about a new job she was considering, but I do remember the father's response. Remember who you are.

This is good advice. Whenever we are in doubt about what we should do, the first thing we should do is remember who we are. The ancient Israelites remembered who they were by remembering who God was and what he had done.

By recounting the stories of how God had worked miracles in their history to form them into a people with their own laws and customs, land and territories, and set them apart to serve as a light to all the other nations, the Israelites remembered who they were.

So too, we want to remember. Each Sunday we get together to remember the story of Jesus, the sacrifice he made for our freedom, so that we could live free from sin – no guilt in life, no fear in death.

This Sunday we remember Christ's sacrifice, and we also remember those others who also sacrificed themselves for us; so that we could live free from oppression, free to gather here this morning to worship without persecution. Those men and women we honor today are part of our story, they form part of our identity, they have helped shape who we are. They are part of our story; they are part of us.

Almighty God,

Upon the cross, sorrow and pain and every dreadful, tragic consequence of sin was overcome.

Today we remember all those who have joined in that sacrifice for peace and justice.
We give thanks for the bravery of men and women who have served for harmony and love.
And in a world that is still torn and broken we declare that Jesus is Lord.
That hope overcomes despair,
That joy overcomes sorrow,
That peace overcomes hostility,
That love overcomes hate.
From the tomb, the promise of eternity emerged in a resurrected Christ.
Grace was poured into the hearts of all those who suffer, mourn and grieve.
Lord, we lift our hearts to you and continue to remember, to hope and to love.

Amen.