

Sunday, November 5, 2017

Joshua 3:7-17

I Thessalonians 2:9-13

Matthew 23:1-12

We Will Remember Them with Hope

On this Sunday before Remembrance Day we continue to learn what it means to serve God faithfully with hope and praise as we honour those who served defending this country in times of war and in times of peace. We also thank those who gave their lives so that we might live in peace and hope for tomorrow. We also honour those who continue to serve around the world striving for peace in places where peace has not existed for long periods of time or ever. We are not here to glorify war for we know that no one wins when weapons are drawn and lives are lost by both sides in a battle. But we are here to honour those who humbled themselves before God to enable future generations to live good lives with hope and dreams ready to be filled.

In these last weeks we have been hearing the story of the people of Israel—former slaves who served in Egypt and how they traveled through desert lands for many years in order to be ready to enter the Promised Land of God. Moses has died and now they are ready to cross the Jordan River near Jericho and enter the land where they would be free. The priests who are carrying the Ark of the Covenant, that is the tablets with God's commandments written on them, walk into the river first. As they take their first steps the water stops flowing. The riverbed becomes dry as these priests hold the Ark in place. The people pass by the ark as they walk through the riverbed of the Jordan to the other side. They recognize the tablets of stone for what they are. The symbol of law which will lead and guide their lives as they begin anew in this new territory they will call home.

If we continue to read this story of the people as they cross the Jordan we learn that one person from each tribe was designated to go by the Ark of the Covenant in the river and they were to pick up a stone. Once everyone crossed the river these stones were placed together as a cairn, a memorial to those who had lived and died during the time of the exodus from Egypt. Their families with many descendants were to look at this cairn of memorial and remember what had occurred at the Jordan River. God had stopped the flow of water for them to safely cross and God then enabled the waters of the Jordan to return to their place at flood stage as before. This pile of rocks became a memorial tribute to those who enabled the next generation to cross into land promised by God. And Joshua reminded the people what this pile of rocks would mean for them and for future generations. A memorial of the exodus journey to a new beginning.

This week many people will gather at memorials and cenotaphs made out of rocks and concrete. Names of the fallen women and men as well as the dates of the wars in which they served are etched in many of these memorials. Out of respect and honour and remembering their sacrifice as well as those who went before them, many of the citizens of Canada will stop, remember and give thanks as they honour their time and effort of years past so that we could live in peace. Circular wreaths of poppies and greenery will be placed by dignitaries and families as they remember the Canadians who served overseas and whose bodies were buried in foreign countries. These circles remind us of God's ongoing love without ending or beginning. These wreaths also remind us of those who returned home, raised families and lived good lives as they encouraged, comforted and urged others to live lives worthy of God. These wreaths remind us of what we are called to do today—to remember and if we cannot remember, to think and learn about the horrors, destruction and losses associated with war. Many of these soldiers returned home and lived with hope for their children and grandchildren to have a better future. They lived according to the way Paul wrote in I Thess. 2 that in order to maintain peace they needed to work hard not to be burdensome to others, but to encourage and comfort others as well as to urge others to live faithfully as God's children. By faith this is our responsibility too.

Jesus continues to teach in the synagogue as we read Matthew 23. Jesus teaches those in the synagogue that they must obey the teachers of the law and the Pharisees and do everything they tell them. But they are not to do what they do that is because they do not put into practise what they preach or teach. They do not lift a finger even though they put heavy burdens on others. This is not the way to faithfully serve God. Jesus continues teaching and in many words he is describing the hypocrisy and greatness of some people along with talking about servanthood and humility or others and which is the best way to live. He states, "The greatest among you will be your servant."

What does this mean for us? Maybe the story of a peacock and duck will help us. A large crowd of people gathered near an enclosure in the Franklin Park Zoo in Boston as a peacock slowly spread his great tail and displayed its stunning plumage. The great bird stood erect and noble and strutted regally. And everyone admired the beautiful tail feathers of the peacock. But just as the crowd was watching the peacock, an old, dun-colored duck waddled slowly from the pond and passed between the proud peacock and the crowd. Enraged, at the duck's audacity to seek attention of the crowd, the peacock pecked and squawked at the duck until the duck went back to the water. In a moment, the beautiful peacock filled with pride and power had become ugly with fierce anger. The plain and awkward duck, having returned to its

natural habitat, was no longer unbecoming. In the water it swam and dived gracefully, unaware that many eyes were still watching. The people who had admired the peacock loved the duck not only for its boldness, its humility or even its swimming capabilities but because it took life as it is—and moved forward.

As Jesus is saying these words those Pharisees and teachers hear that he is calling them hypocrites and power seeking leaders. Yet Jesus is speaking to the crowd and telling them being great is not the best way to live amongst others; one needs to be humble and just be themselves. As each person looked at the peacock strutting around, all were reminded of the dangers of pride. And then as they looked at the duck- they realized that happiness comes from just being ourselves.

As we reflect on Jesus' words let us remember how we are each called to serve Christ in this church and in all the places we go each day. We are called to serve with humility and love, by sharing and showing love with others. We are not to be filled with pride and strut around others as they walk, but to be humble and caring and kind.

When we remember the men and women who served throughout several wars and international conflicts we need to be reminded that they were taught to love just like us. But in faithful and humble service they gave of themselves so that others might live with hope. God has called us to live and love and be his people in our time and generation. Are we willing to serve faithfully? And are we willing to remember with hope our history which enables us to live with freedom.

Jesus taught us that the greatest amongst us is those who serve. For whoever exalts himself will be humbled and whoever humbles himself will be exalted. We remember those who humbled themselves in war and today we honour them and thank them for their service, commitment and effort to bring about change in a world which continues to evolve.

Let us remember this as we praise God and rejoice in his love for us all. Let us do so as we remember them with hope.

PRAYER

Holy God we thank you and as we remember those who have died in the horrors of war, we pray that war will end and that your creation which should bring joy to the world, seems lost and in chaos because we have not experienced peace. Let this day of remembrance be an inspiration to our witness. Let us prepare the way for your vision of peace revealed by Jesus. Let us pray for peace. Amen.