

Sunday, November 5, 2023 ***“Greatest One as Servant”***

1 Thessalonians 2:9-13 Matthew 23:1-12

Coal mining is the process of extracting coal from the ground or from a mine. Coal is valued for its energy content and since the 1880s has been widely used to generate electricity. The coal mining industry has a long history of significant negative environmental impacts on local ecosystems, health impacts on local communities and workers, and contributes heavily to the global environmental crises, such as poor air quality and climate change. For these reasons, coal has been one of the first fossil fuels to be phased out of various parts of the global energy economy. But years ago, coal mining was a thankless kind of job totally lacking in any glory.

During the dark days of World War II, England had a great deal of difficulty keeping men in the coal mines. Most chose to join the various military services as they desired something that could give them more social acceptance and recognition. Something was needed to motivate these men in the work that they were doing so that they would remain in the mines.

With this in mind, Winston Churchill delivered a speech one day to thousands of coal miners, stressing to them the importance of their role in the war effort. He did this by painting for them a mental picture. He told them to picture the grand parade that would take place when VE Day came. First, he said, would come the sailors of the British Navy, the ones who had upheld the grand tradition of Trafalgar and the defeat of the Armada. Next in the parade, he said, would come the pilots of the Royal Air Force. They were the ones who, more than any other, had saved England from the dreaded German Luftwaffe. Next in the parade would come the Army, the ones that had stood tall at the crises of Dunkirk.

Last of all, he said, would come a long line of sweat-stained, soot-streaked men in miner's caps. And someone, he said, would cry from the crowd, "And where were you during the critical days of the struggle?" And then from ten thousand throats would come, "We were deep in the earth with our faces to the coal." We are told that there were tears in the eyes of many of those soot laden and weathered faced coal miners. They had been given a sense of their own self-worth by the man at the top.

What does it mean to serve? It is the action of helping or doing work for someone or the assistance or advice given to customers during and after the sale of goods. But when we talk about military service it

On this Sunday before Remembrance Day this idea of service comes to the forefront as we observe the meaning behind the poppies we wear. Service- is giving of oneself for the

purpose of helping and assisting another. And it does not always come with big fancy ribbons or high pay or recognition. Service is a means by which one cares and shares of themselves.

Jesus has been asked questions in the passages we have shared in these last weeks; questions which might have tripped up others yet his responses have lead those leaders of the synagogue frustrated and in some cases angry. Was Jesus trying to upset them to cause difficulties for the disciples and himself? Yes, he was and he tells them about that when one really serves another, they must be humble. He accuses the scribes and Pharisees of teaching yes, but not putting into practise their own words. They pass on heavy burdens to others to perform but resist any action on their own parts. They do everything in order to be seen and to look great doing it. They like to be honoured and respected for what they do but do nothing in serving others.

But Jesus then states what probably irked these listeners—that they are not the Rabbi- for there is only one father, teacher and one Messiah. And of course when he says this, he is stirring them up. He describes what they are doing against God’s teachings. He then laments over the city- Jerusalem, Jerusalem the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it. How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings and you were not willing! One can only imagine how these leaders felt as they heard this teacher talk negatively about what they have been doing.

Just think for a moment put yourself in the synagogue with the scribes and Pharisees. How would you react with Jesus words criticizing your service to others? How would you feel? What does this make you reflect upon and think?

As we focus on Remembering and honouring those who fought and died for the sake of freedom in our world, we often say “thank you’ for your service. Canadian Forces personnel today are not under the same experiences of those who were in battlegrounds or fighting in trenches. But where they are now serving is still dangerous and requiring commitment and trust in those who serve with them.

Serving others as one individual can mean the difference of how we perceive others’ because of what one does in peace and in times of conflict. And also in their daily living.

James Moore tells the story of being invited to participate in a "Career Day" panel discussion with the focus, "How Faith Influences Your Choice of a Career." First, panelists were asked to introduce themselves and mention their particular vocations. It was all rather routine. One

woman gave her name and said, "I'm an attorney." A man gave his name and said, "I'm in business. I own a computer company." A woman gave her name and said, "I'm in real estate." When it was Dr. Moore's turn he said, "I'm a minister." The person seated next to him was a doctor. But it was what the doctor's stated that changed mundane situation into a special and sacred moment. The doctor addressed the students, "We are here today to talk about vocation." He told them that the word vocation actually meant "calling." "Well," the doctor told them, "my calling is to be a Christian...and one of the ways to do that is through the practice of medicine." This man Moore writes, "was not being pompous or arrogant. He was a humble man who had a strong sense of partnership with God." His life was a success, but his first priority was service.

How do we place ourselves in the service of others? Paul in writing to the Thessalonians describes how Paul and his companions worked among them. They witnessed them as being upright and blameless and caring like a parent to a child. Then he states, "then you heard the word from us but that they didn't accept it as a human word but as God's word which is at work in you believers."

The word which is at work in you! This is service! And the way we are to serve is by humbling ourselves. Jesus said, "All who exalt themselves will be humbled, and all who humble themselves will be exalted." Just think about this too= that humble acts of service provide us with the deepest sense of joy and the most fulfilling satisfaction.

In a "Peanuts" cartoon strip, Lucy, is known to be ever-ready with unsolicited advice, is playing right-field in a baseball game. Charlie Brown is pitching. "Let's win one for a change Charlie Brown," Lucy cries out. Charlie Brown then throws his first pitch and the batter hits the ball to right-field. But Lucy makes no attempt to catch it. She just stands there and does nothing. Charlie Brown yells out at her, "If you're so interested in winning, why didn't you try to catch the ball?" To which a defiant Lucy replies, "My role is strictly advisory."

What role do you serve? Faith in action or advisory?

Those who served during wars and conflicts were not advisors but put their lives on the line. They gave it their all- self sacrifice and love for country and others. They served others for the greater good. Whom do you serve and how humble are you?

Let us pray.

Holy God, hear our prayers as we seek to serve you in faith and with hope. Help us to humble ourselves in your service. We ask in faith and in love. Amen.