

## **Remembrance Sunday – November 5, 2017**

### **Philippians 1:3-9**

In his novel, *Birdsong*, set during the First World War, author Sebastian Faulk gives a poignant description of the day after battle. This is an excerpt from the novel:

“Price was reading the roll call. Before him were standing the men from his company who had managed to return. Their faces were shifty and grey in the dark.

To begin with he asked after the whereabouts of each missing man. After a time he saw that it would take too long. Those who had survived were not always sure whom they had seen dead. They hung their heads in exhaustion, as though every organ of their bodies was begging for release.

Price began to speed the process. He hurried from one unanswered name to the next, Byrne, Hunt, Jones, Tipper, Wood, Leslie, Barnes, Studd, Richardson, Savile, Thompson, Hodgson, Birkenshaw, Llewellyn, Francis, Arkwright, Duncan, Shea, Simons, Anderson, Blum, Fairborther. Names came pattering into the dusk, bodying out the places of their forebears, the villages and towns where the telegrams would be delivered, the houses where the blinds would be drawn, where low moans would come in the afternoon behind closed doors; and the places that had borne them, which would be like nunneries, like dead towns without their life or purpose without the sound of fathers and their children, without young men at the factories or in the fields, ...

Of 800 men in the battalion, 155 answered their names. Price told his company to dismiss, though he said it without the bark of the parade ground; he said it kindly. They attempted to turn, then moved off stiffly in new formations, next to men they had never seen before. They closed ranks.”

We come together today to remember:

To remember with pride and appreciation those who have given their lives in service of others, for those who continue to serve for peace, for first responders and all who seek to make the world safer and more just for all.

To remember with sadness the suffering, destruction and pain caused by human conflict.

To remember with gratitude those whose lives, love and friendship, ours has been the privilege to share and to remember with sadness those whose death has caused us loneliness and pain.

We remember and we commit ourselves to be peacemakers and peacekeepers wherever that opportunity falls within our grasp.

We pause to recognise the value and worth of every life lost and so express the mystery that to be human is to be both marred by our common failings yet fashioned in the image of our Creator.

And in our remembrance we give God thanks for memory itself for we will remember.

Memory is an interesting thing. Think back to some of your earliest memories. Some will be quite vivid, others will not and we might struggle to understand why particular events or scenes are so etched into our consciousness. Memory is not always neat and logical, but it enables us to see beyond the immediate.

Paul's letter to the Philippians was written at a particularly dark and difficult moment in his life. He tells us elsewhere that he is not even sure if he will be spared for many more days; he is imprisoned and expecting execution. Yet he describes his state of mind as one of thankfulness, joy and confidence. This is not because of his immediate circumstances, but his capacity to remember. Paul remembers the care and affection of his friends in Philippi; he remembers the things God has been doing in and through them; he remembers their common purpose of sharing the Gospel; and he remembers that God will be with him no matter what.

Sometimes we prefer not to remember. Blocking out particularly traumatic memories is one of the ways our human minds cope with some of the very difficult things that happen to people. More and more information on the effects of trauma on the human mind are becoming evident to us. The ravages of post-traumatic stress disorder on soldiers and first responders is devastating. As Brian Woods writes: "Many soldiers find themselves straddling two worlds. Their body is physically within the relative safety of being home, but their mind functions as if it were still surrounded by danger in the war zone. It is a challenge and a struggle that no soldier ever trains for, and for many, it proves too much." On a day when we are called to remember let us give thanks for those who serve and have served, especially for those who have given their lives in the line of duty. But let us also acknowledge those who returned home, but feeling empty, and numb, on the inside. And let us call attention to these invisible wounds that affect so many, raising awareness of the need for our communities and our congregations to take action to help their recovery.

Coming together today to remember, and doing so in the presence of God and each other, is a powerful opportunity. For some of us here, the pain of loss and parting might be so great that we too struggle to believe that we have anything to thank God for. Sometimes our acts of remembrance are tinged with a sense of guilt; wondering if we could have done more; wishing we might have made more of our parting; or perhaps even feeling guilty that we have survived when others haven't. But God has given us the capacity to remember and we are invited to use those memories not to rub salt into the wounds of the present, but to discover that even in our present struggles and pain we can find cause to be thankful.

When we read Paul's letters, he has much to say about God's grace, mercy and forgiveness. Had he not been able to grasp this lavish expression of God's nature, then he would never have

been able to be such an energetic and active member of the Christian community. Paul understood that God is a God of forgiveness, a God who can offer healing, restoration and a new start.

Remembering might not be easy, that's why for generations people have come together in acts of remembrance, supporting and helping one another in the struggle and need. Let us use the memories of the past to find God in the present. But let's not be afraid to cry, or even express our anger and despair to God – for God does not demand of us that we come to God in a state of polite composure. But through remembering; sharing our stories; laughing and crying together we will find the strength for each new day's challenge.

Remembering our loved ones, remembering those who gave their lives and those who continue to put their lives at risk for us all might be painful, but forgetting them or allowing others to forget them would be a far greater tragedy. So by sharing this act of remembrance let us pray that by God's grace we might reach that place where like Paul, we can look back and say "I thank my God, every time I remember you."

And so, with remembrance and thanks, I invite us to pause together and watch this video ...

*Video link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-VInKRNQ93s&t=12s>*

We will remember. Thanks be to God. Amen.

Rev. Heather Power