



Remembrance Sunday Sermon

John 15:12,13

“My commandment is this; love one another, just as I have loved you. The greatest love a person can have for his friends is to give his life for them.”

During both world wars, a lot of young men felt it was their duty to sign up to go and fight for their country – I say their country because it wasn't just the British. Each country had men and women wanting to join the fight, each thinking their side was right. The youngest of these were just 18, maybe younger, as some lied just to go, to stand up and be counted. Those who couldn't fight worked in the war rooms, planning or inventing things. Remember, we didn't have tanks or aeroplanes, we even invented the bouncing bomb! Women took over men's jobs to keep the country going. They worked in munitions, in factories, on the farms and did their bit for everyone. Men and women became code-breakers, intercepting secret messages and saving the day.

It all sounds like a super-hero comic book and yet in reality, it was hell on Earth. The First World War seemed especially bad, with the deep mud caused by heavy artillery and horses. The trenches were ankle deep in water, there were rats, food rations, heavy woollen uniforms – it must have been unbearable. Young men who had thought of returning a hero, met with the stark reality, the stench of death and in their panic, not wanting to go over the top, they met with death anyway for being a coward.

There are as many heroic tales as there were men who fought. In World War 1, 60 million soldiers fought, 20 million died including civilians. It must have been horrendous and yet – each soldier fought to save us from having a dictator for a ruler. Each soldier died, giving their lives for each of us. When we read the words of the Kohima epitaph, it is written as one of the soldiers – ‘When you go home, tell them of us and say, “For your tomorrow we gave our today.” As if the dead soldiers were saying to those who survived – go and tell everyone what we did, tell them we gave up our lives so that everything will be alright.

Just like Jesus. He gave up his life for each of us, so that we can have a life of love and forgiveness and have a good relationship with God. To lay down your life for someone – could you? Really?

The poppy that has become a symbol of remembrance, also reminds me of faith. For the gardeners among us, you'll know that seeds are very different. Some will grow in weeks, others months and yet others may take years. During the First World War, the horses and artillery trucks churned over the fields. Seeds that had been deep in the soil were brought to the surface. When the fields were left silent, the flowers had time to grow. Millions of poppies, fields of red and green made a giant graveyard beautiful again. Faith is like that. A small seed at first and only God knows when our faith will grow and flourish. Maybe now, maybe in a few months, maybe many years from now, but faith is faith and that is all God wants in return for Jesus laying down his life for us. I can only sow the seed and try and help it grow, the rest is up to you. So remember all those who gave up their lives so that we could have a tomorrow and at the same time, let's spare a thought for those fighting today against a pandemic, putting their lives on the lines to keep us safe. Let us count our blessings and thank God for his never ending love.

Rev. Deborah Johnstone, Christ Church Ainsworth

