

我們記得 We Remember

Mark 12:38-44, Yr. B. Remembrance Sunday, November 8, 2015

This week marks the beginning of our country. A new government has been sworn-in. Justin Trudeau is our prime minister. As I look at the members of his cabinet, it strikes me that this cabinet does look more like Canada! This is the beginning, and we will hold them accountable. But I can't hide my excitement as my country now cares about the climate change, gender equality, aboriginal justice, and much more.

That is a big change from the past.

The month of November gives us two occasions to think about the past. All Saints Day, then Remembrance Day. What is Remembrance Day?

At the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month in 1918, the armistice – laying down of arms – was signed to end the first World War. Many countries name it Remembrance, recalling the sacrifice made by women and men in both World War I, “the war to end all wars”, and the many wars that have taken place since.

As Canadians who have Asian heritage, we also remember the warfare that occurred in Asia. We remember the Nanjing massacre, Vietnam War, and Korean War.

Those were the times when the world was turned upside down. To be enlisted and called to fight for your country was an honour. Today we remember men and women who heard that call, and went to the battlefield or war zone. Many have sacrificed their lives.

Wearing a remembrance poppy is just a small way to show we still remember. To show we care. To show we will not forget. To wear a poppy signifies a recognition in us that the past still lives in us, vivid, and clear.

Today we remember:

... the soldiers who died in the two world wars and many others afterward.

Today we remember:

... those who are unknown to us, and us unknown to them, but because of their sacrifices, we have a peaceful land to live in.

Today we remember

... November 9th, the Kristallnacht. The Night of the Broken Glass. In 1938 carried out by non Jewish citizens in Europe where synagogues and shops owned by Jews were badly damaged. Some Jews were murdered. What followed was concentration camps and death camps.

Today we remember. But somehow I feel remembering shouldn't be the only thing we do.

I want to show how much I care for the returning veterans. If they came back with broken arms or legs, or suffer from psychological trauma, we don't want to neglect their needs. I feel we need to do more than remembering because I want to know who to build peace between neighbors, between friends, between religious traditions, between nations. How can we have peace?

On this day when many of us may feel world peace is beyond our power to foster, we will not ignore the responsibilities we have to make our neighbours more peaceful, more kind. and just.

In the gospel text today, we hear how Jesus praises the selfless act of a woman. Did she know that her act is being used by Jesus as teaching material? Did this woman realize that someone is watching her as she drop two coins? To see this woman as an exemplar is the usual way of reading. In the past, I thought Jesus was asking us to do the same as this woman did. But I wonder today.

I wonder: Was Jesus praising this woman as an exemplar? Or was Jesus decrying the exploitations and injustices of the Temple practice at the time?

If we read the larger text, the book Mark,

- This passage is part of a larger set of passages that focus on Jesus' confrontation with the scribes and Pharisees and center on his critique of the Temple.
- Verse 38, the text condemns the scribes precisely for "devouring widow's houses".
- In the passage immediately after this one, Jesus foretells the destruction of the Temple itself.

- And there is actually no word of praise in Jesus' statement about the widow or any indication that Jesus is lifting her up as an example. All he does is describe what she is doing.

All of this leads me and some biblical scholars to conclude that Jesus isn't actually lifting her up as an exemplar but rather decrying the circumstances that demand her to make such an offering, a sacrifice that will likely lead to destitution. Jesus is leveling a devastating critique against Temple practice and those who allow, let alone encourage, this woman to give "all she had to live on".

The good news of this passage comes in what it says about the God we worship, the God we confess Jesus reveals most clearly. This God cares about this woman and her sacrifice. This God sees her plight and recognizes her affliction.

This God will not countenance such abuse, even and especially under the guise of religious piety and so decries those who would order their world and religion to make such sacrifices necessary.

God sees her...and God cares about her.

Here is another case to be cautious. We can't afford to turn this first century in-house materials into material for anti-Semitism. The story is context loaded. This is not the text for us to think less of the Jews and Judaism today. Rather, it invites us to examine our own greedy tradition, and how we turn of love for God into action.

The scribes are openly accused of being addicted to self-centered privileges and greed dressed up as religious piety. The phrase "for the sake of appearance" carries a meaning of "pretending." It is pretending holy and wise; pretending to be someone that we are not are what we need to be aware of.

Jesus, through the sacrificial act of this woman, decries a system that takes away people's enjoyment of God's world. It is a lamentation of a greedy world, a world that requires people to sacrifice, to suffer, even to die in order for some to live.

The gospel that we receive from Jesus shouldn't be just about personal wellbeing and peace in the next world; but about inspiring us to be hopeful and caring about all people in this world.

From there we envision that a different world is possible. I am so longing to see

Israelis and Palestinians to live in peace. I am so longing to see men and women to live with mutual respect; and women not be exploited because of their gender.

I am so longing to see gays and lesbians and transgendered people have a safe and respected land to live on, just like many of us. That we will not see them less than human or less loved by God. God doesn't.

I am so longing to live with respect to aboriginal peoples and their land; and will not look down at them with prejudices and biases. Even if this text isn't about praising the woman as an exemplar, this woman's act still inspired me.

This woman challenges me to live a life that is thankful, committed, and kind. She challenges me on how I should think of stewardship and generosity. She tells me who is really rich and who is really poor. She tells me something about the world that we live in, about how a system has taken away the joy of many people. She tells me about the need to be actively involved in bringing changes.

Her story and many others inspire me to live life beyond my own interest and comfort, to seek the common good, to always look for ways to make this world a better place to live.

Today, we remember, we choose not to forget. We want this world to be peaceful and better. But let us pause and give thanks to those who have paid a big price for peace.

Remembrance Day isn't about glorifying war. No it isn't. It is through remembering the sacrifices soldiers made we human beings learn to think twice when we wage war again.

I found this poem by Harry Riley:

Remember Me (The voice of the dead)

Remember me
Duty called and I went to war
Though I'd never fired a gun before
I paid the price for your new day
As all my dreams were blown away

Remember me

We all stood true as whistles blew
And faced the shell and stench of Hell
Now battle's done, there is no sound
Our bones decay beneath the ground
We cannot see, or smell, or hear
There is no death, or hope or fear

Remember me
Once we, like you, would laugh and talk
And run and walk and do the things that you all do
But now we lie in rows so neat
Beneath the soil, beneath your feet

Remember me
In mud and gore and the blood of war
We fought and fell and move no more
Remember me, I am not dead
I'm just a voice within your head