

Remembrance Sunday, 13th Nov 2016,
Acts 2:37-end, and also John chapter 15.

Prayer:

O Lord, Jesus Christ, the Way, the Truth and the Life,
we pray that you will not let us stray from you, the Way, nor
distrust you, the Truth, nor rest in anything other than you –
the Life.

Teach us by your Holy Spirit, what to believe, what to do,
and how to take our rest. Amen.

Growing up, I was involved in the beavers, cubs and scouts
– as I think a few of our members were also. One
significant date in our calendar would be Remembrance
Sunday – that Sunday closest to 11th November, when
United Kingdom would pause and remember those who
had been killed in military service in the First and Second
world wars and the wars such as in Korea, the Falklands
and Iraq, since. The UK of course, isn't the only country to
remember – the members of the British Commonwealth –
Canada, Australia, New Zealand etc all use that same date.
And France and Belgium will remember on 11th November
Armistice Day recalling the end of the first world war which
devastated their countries, and in the USA, Veterans Day,
11th November recalling those who have served and who
are currently serving in the military or who are reservists...
Of course, other countries have other dates to remember,
such as May 4th here in the Netherlands. Remembrance
Sunday was a day when we turned out in our uniforms, in
rain or sun, cold or very wet, to remember the young and
old who gave their lives in service of their country...

At the heart of that Day of Remembrance is sacrifice. The
poppies we wear or see – the vivid red reminding us of the

fields in Flanders and others places where people of our age and younger died.

Sacrifice is a word with strong Christian resonance. It is a word Christ applies to community. He has called his followers – created a community – he called them to be with him and that he would send them out, in the purposes of the kingdom of God, that they would be disciples and disciples life long. John 15 shows, for his church Christ had an upward direction, ‘Abide in me’, an inward direction– ‘love one another’ and an outward direction, ‘you also will bear witness.’ And as a Church we desire to have that Up, In, Out in our core as a church. And when Jesus talks of IN, of discipleship and community, he says: ¹² *My command is this: love each other as I have loved you.*

¹³ *Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.* ¹⁴ *You are my friends if you do what I command.”* Retired US General Harold Moore wrote “We were soldiers once and young”, discussing his command’s first battle in Vietnam. In the opening pages he quotes those words of Jesus: ¹³ *Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.* Jesus teaching resonated with him of what military service and warfare meant to him. Serving with ones friends – those who began as strangers but over training and combat became friends – ones he would be willing to lay down his life for. Christ is talking of his own coming sacrifice, yet he tells the community, that true Christian love, is sacrificial love. A Christ like community – *a deep Christlike community as we want to be here* – is seeing each believer as a friend and being willing to lay down your life for them. A deep Christ like community Jesus says – is loving, sacrificial, just like he was...The word sacrifice is stretching. This is more than acting justly and loving mercy – as Lord says through the

prophet Micah. It is more than refusing to allow barriers to exist between us and others, that we are forgiving, that we will not allow this church to become dysfunctional and to be a church of cliques and broken. Jesus invites us to sacrificial love, which is a willing to *lay it all down* for others, for the band of brothers and sisters around us.

In Shropshire, on Remembrance Sunday such as this time last year, I would lead the service with a church full of people wearing poppies. And, I would speak about remembering, giving thanks, and seeking to learn the lessons from our past, wanting to build a better tomorrow. Jolanda a few years ago said, she wanted to share a few words in the Sunday Service – where we were in Telford – to say ‘Thank you’ to the people there. For while my sermon would focus on how the people their grandfathers, their uncles, even brothers in some cases, went to fight, she wanted to say thank you, for *their* sacrifices, to help bring liberation to her country the Netherlands, so it could be free. To thank them, those church members whose relatives and friends had been willing to lay it all down for a country many of them had never been to, for people they had never met, for villages and streets they had never heard of.

Jesus invites us to sacrificial love. General Moore used that phrase ‘to lay down ones life for their friends.’ How can we become *friends* as a church? Two steps we want to make as a church. A friendly church means we *treat each other* as friends. A person who is new – a visitor, a short term worker, a refugee, a business man on a week long visit to Amersfoort, etc is “a not yet friend.” We welcome them – not just by our stewards, but by each of us, helping this to be the best service they have ever had, and afterwards,

over coffee, they are welcomed into our community and personal networks. It is one of the reasons I ask that we speak English as much as possible during a service and post service and we speak English to any visitor. As we are an English language service Anglican Church, many who visit and decide to join will have English perhaps as their first language. But our welcome doesn't stop at the coffee, truly welcoming means welcoming anyone new into the heart and soul and life of our church, not leaving them on the fringes...

To help that, our second step. We want to establish a strong system of small groups, home groups. We see in Acts 2, that believers gathered as a large body but also in smaller groups located in homes. In our own church, some small groups exist already but we want to deepen and develop this. A home group, is a place where we pray together, stand alongside each other in joy and pain, a place where we study God's word and wrestle with what it means for our lives, our marriages, for our retirements. A place where we are accountable to each other, to keep each other on track. A safe space where we can share doubts, fears, pain. A place where we can also explore the gifts and skills God has given us. A place where strangers, become friends, or friends become deep, life long ones... We want to be a deep community, one of friends, seeking to be life long disciples.

Sacrifices means standing alongside one another. In the book and series 'Band of Brothers', it recalls the 101st Airborne Division in their service in Europe in 1944 and 45. In a long battle in the Ardennes at a town called Bastogne, there is the focus on Sergeant Lipton, who visits the men during gaps in the battle, to encourage, to challenge, to

have a joke, to command. He is someone who *stands alongside* his men and the men of the unit.

When Jesus says – love one another as I have loved you – Christ stood alongside us in our need, and he invites us to stand alongside our fellow believers in their needs. That can be through small groups, or on a Sunday. At times we want someone to pray with us, to stand with us in prayer, to seek the Lord together. One way to do this, is that we plan to establish a prayer ministry – after Sunday services where two people will pray with you for anything and everything. It will begin one Sunday a month and then we'd like to grow it. One of the ways, we can stand by each other.

In the Anglican Liturgy, Remembrance Sunday has remembrance, thanksgiving but also promising to make a better world. Our remembrance and thanksgiving leads us into action and change. Jesus vision is about living for him outside the Christian community – that is why people will turn against his followers. What he is saying, is that Christian faith is not Sunday only but what happens also Monday to Saturday. It is about discipleship – living out our faith wherever we live and work and where life takes us. As we end our services we say: Go in peace *to love and serve the Lord*, in the name of Christ. A deacon once said at the end of a service – “our worship has ended, our service begins.” Maybe we would tweak that dismissal: “our corporate worship in words has ended, our worship in action, our service, begins!” Christ calls us to Abide in him – *Up*, he challenges us to be loving sacrificially – *in*, but also our discipleship, our following of him, is worked *out* in the world, in Nov 2016, what it means to be a Christian parent or manager, or consultant or a member of the military, or lecturer, or counsellor, or mum or dad, or grandparent, or student or brother or sister. Our world changes and so does

the challenges and demands of discipleship. For example, Donald Trump's election raises new challenges for our Christian brothers and sisters in the USA, challenges for those who voted for him, for those who did not. Challenges how to support a leader they may have been opposed to, how to be peacemakers in troubled districts or cities, how to bring healing in places where work colleagues voted differently or where maybe their churches are bitterly divided.

And we want our Sundays and our weekly church life to be places where we are equipped to be life long disciples: to offer prayer ministry where we pray for each other as we seek to live faithfully; to have our small groups dynamic places of discipleship growth – our Acts 2 reading shows believers meeting together both in large numbers and in smaller gatherings - and to add to this, these coming months, we want to begin teenage work – for over 12s, to help them work out what it means to faithfully follow Jesus in our world.

This day, Remembrance Sunday, shows us and reminds us of one way Christ invites us to live out our discipleship. We will make an act of dedication, where we, in God's presence, commit ourselves to be peacemakers, to be healers of the wounded, to be those who act justly to build a just world, a world that God created, loves and died for, a world that he will redeem at the consummation of his kingdom, a world where peace shall reign and wars will cease.

Remembrance Sunday – as we look at the poppies we wear, or the poppy in our hand, we remember the sacrifice of men and women from years ago or recently, we think of

Christ's sacrifice for us, *and* we accept his challenge to be a people of deep community where we will sacrificially love all, where we will commit ourselves to follow him no matter the costs and to be agents of change in our world for the kingdom of God...

Closing prayer:

In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**