

“Within the Human Heart”

Nov. 10, 2019

Genesis 4: 1-16 & Isaiah 2: 1-5 & James 4: 1-10

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This is a time of Remembrance across Canada. Why do we remember? It's an important question. What are memories? What are they all about? Think for a moment about those memories that you keep very close to you. We all have them. We all have memories we like to remember and we all have memories we would like to forget. What things should we remember?



One of the great composers of our time is Andrew Lloyd Webber.

How many of you know one of his musicals - “Cats?” The most haunting song in it is “Memory.”

Memory, all alone in the moonlight

I can smile at the old days; I was beautiful then

I remember the time I knew what happiness was;

Let the memory live again.

I don't know about you, but that song always makes me want to cry. The simple truth is, it's memory that makes us human. Without memory we would not know who we are. It's memory that allows us to know our names, our friends, our past – where we come from and where we live. Without memory we would not, could not, be human. One of the more stressful things about growing older is forgetting things – especially forgetting names and places that we ought to know well. I find it really upsetting to see someone I know well and at that very moment their name pops right out of my head. I know that the name will come back to me - later - in an hour or a day, but that sure doesn't help at the time. And when it comes to Alzheimer's and other forms of dementia, the saddest thing is the loss of a person you knew and loved, complicated by the fact that he or she is still alive.

There are a series of books in the Bible that lie in between the Old Testament and the New Testament called the Apocrypha. Five hundred years ago Martin Luther declared them to be unscriptural. As a result they are not in our Protestant Bibles, and so we almost never read them. Luther threw the Apocrypha out when he discovered that the Hebrew Rabbis didn't view them as scriptural. That was good enough for him. The Roman Catholics on the other hand have always kept them in their Bibles. I rather think the Catholics were right to keep them, because there are some passages in the Apocrypha that are wonderful. This is one is from the book of Ecclesiasticus.

Ecclesiasticus Chapter 44.

“Let us now sing the praises of famous people, our ancestors in their generations. There were those who ruled in their nations, and made a name for themselves by their courage. There were those who gave wise and intelligent counsel; and those who composed musical tunes, and wrote poetry.

They were endowed with ability, living peacefully in their homes. They were honoured in their generation, and were the pride of their times. They have left behind a name, so that we may remember and declare their praise.

But of others there is no memory. They have perished as though they had never existed. They have become as though they had never been born, they and their children after them.

But these too were godly folk, whose righteous deeds should not be forgotten. Their bodies are buried in peace, and their deeds live after them – generation after generation.”



A few years ago I walked through one of the many war cemeteries in Europe. The white headstones stretch on row after row, acre after acre. It is quite overwhelming.

Canadian War Cemetery - Ortona Italy

When you read the inscriptions you realize how young they were – 18, 19, 22, 24. And every so often there is no name or age given. The headstone simply reads ‘A Canadian Soldier – known unto God’.

Tomorrow at 11 o'clock in the [morning](#), traffic will draw to a halt at the center of our city. People will gather before the War Memorial at the center of our city to remember. We pause every year on November eleventh because it was on the eleventh hour of the eleventh day, of the eleventh month in 1918, that the guns fell silent on the western front. The great war; the war to end all wars, was finally over. The soldiers wept, cheered, and danced in the trenches, and the whole world celebrated. We have never forgotten that moment. So it is tomorrow at the Brockville Cenotaph at 11 o'clock that we will pause to remember those who fought and died in the First World War, the Second World War, in Korea, in Afghanistan and on Peace Keeping missions.

It is important to remember. Over one hundred thousand young Canadians lie buried in Europe as a result of two world wars. I grew up in the shadow of the Second World War. I can remember my father still in uniform coming home from overseas. He served with the R.C.A.F. As a child growing up in Ottawa, most of my friends' fathers were veterans. It was natural for us to talk about the war and ask questions about it. What I discovered was the veterans were not really interested in talking about it — they mostly wanted to forget it. Those who had seen the worst of it talked about it the least. What is

also clear to me is that the veterans returned home with a tremendous desire and determination to spend the rest of their lives doing things that would built up and enhance our world. They had seen enough of death and destruction to last a lifetime.

Perhaps the strangest thing about the history of humankind is the universal longing for harmony and peace on the one hand, and the universal presence of killing and war on the other. People long for peace, but wars never seem to cease. People long for harmony, but everywhere there is bitterness. People long for love, but we keep being surrounded by hate.

Earlier we read the story of Cain and Abel from the book of Genesis. It shows how deeply rooted the problem is. The death of Abel is the very first one recorded in the Bible. And that first death was a rather brutal murder of one brother by another. Carl Jung, the great psychologist, called it the dark side of human nature. The Bible calls it sin or evil, and it tells that it has always been part of the human condition.

In Hebrew the name 'Adam' simply means 'man.' Eve on the other hand means 'life.' They had a son. Eve named him Cain because she says, "I got him with the help of the Lord." In Hebrew 'Cain' sounds like the word 'got.' Her second son was Abel. In Hebrew, 'Abel' means 'breath' or 'vapour' — something ethereal without substance, like life itself. According to the story, Abel's offering of a young lamb seemed to please God more than Cain's offering of grain. I am not surprised that it seemed that way to Cain. Think of your own backyard barbecue. Any fat portion on a piece of meat always burns well. It flares up so much that we often we cut that part off before putting a steak on the barbecue. Grain, on the other hand, doesn't burn very well. It tends to smoulder and smoke.

What we have in Genesis chapter 4 is a classic tale of jealousy. Life did not seem fair to Cain. "Why should Abel be doing better than me? I work hard too, but he gets all the credit. It's just not fair." He resented the fact that someone who was no more worthy or smarter, was doing much better than he was. He wanted for himself what his brother had.

Now before we condemn Cain, we need to look in the mirror, because we have all been there ourselves. The truth is life is unfair in so many ways. And we all have felt resentment when other friends or members of our family do better than we do. It can be quite galling. Why did my sister get to marry a doctor and I only got a teacher — worse still a minister? The resentment can get stronger if you come down with an unwanted illness, or have a handicap, or get injured in an accident that wasn't your fault.

According to the story, Cain was so bitter that he couldn't hide it. God said to him "Why are you looking so miserable? Why so angry? If you choose

what is right, it will put a smile on your face. If you choose what is wrong, be careful — sin is crouching at your door, waiting to destroy you.”



How many of you have seen a wonderful movie about Mozart called ‘Amadeus’?

His middle name was Amadeus – Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. He was one of the greatest composers who ever lived. What is so amazing about him is that he never revised his manuscripts. He didn’t have to. If you look at original manuscripts of most great composers, you will see lots of changes, lines scratched out, revisions here and there. Not so with Mozart. The music just seemed to spring out perfectly from his head. He never had to change a note.



Now, there was another composer who lived at the same time. His name was Antonio Salieri. He knew Mozart and he hated him for the same reason that Cain hated Abel — jealousy. In Salieri’s mind it was just not fair for God to give him the desire to be a great composer and not the talent, while at the same time giving great talent to a flibbertigibbet like Mozart. Salieri was devout. Mozart was a party-goer. Salieri worked hard. Mozart didn’t have to. In the end Salieri became so bitter that he denounced God, took his own personal crucifix and burned it in the fireplace.

The irony is that Salieri was quite a good composer - not as good as Mozart, but good nonetheless. What he never learned is that life is never fair in the way he wanted it to be. What counts in life is not what another person has or does not have, but what you do with what you have. In the New Testament, in James 4 we read, “Why do you fight and argue with each other? Isn't it because you are full of selfish desires that struggle to control you? You want something you don't have, and you will do anything to get it. Some will even kill.”

James is saying that the root of the problem and the hope of the solution, dwell in the same place — in the human heart. We not only have to want to do good; we need the power and energy to do it. I believe that this power we seek and so desperately need to live well, and avoid the things that can destroy us, comes from the Spirit of our Lord Jesus Christ. Our faith affirms very strongly that his death on the cross broke the very power of evil that hung him there in the first place. It unleashed an enormous energy of love in a new and powerful way. It opened a direct channel between heaven and earth. It reconciled people to God and to each other. Through Jesus’ death and resurrection, hearts of stone have begun to beat with love and understanding. It took the blood of Jesus to wash away the deepest stains of

human sin. It took a powerful force to take on the evil of this world — and that force was and is the love of God in Jesus Christ our Lord.

It is when we seek this love by the power and energy of the Holy Spirit in our hearts that we start to change. It is when the love of Christ lives in our heart that selfish desires start to look foolish and begin to recede.

I believe that the day will come when people of all nations will know that they are as closely related as were Cain and Abel, and that to kill one another is but to slay a brother or a sister. I believe that the sacrifices of our Canadian soldiers, sailors, and airmen were not in vain, and that the ceremony at the cenotaph tomorrow will remind us of a better way — a world without violence — a world without war, where we will beat our swords into ploughshares and our spears into pruning hooks. A world where “Nation will never again lift up sword against nation, neither will we learn war any more.”

Amen.

Following the message we held our own time of remembrance:

Laying of Wreath by Tom Burton (Retired Air Force)

Last Post

Minute of Silence

Reveille & singing of O Canada