

Remembering

Rev. Shelagh MacKinnon

Nov. 11, 2018

This is a hard day for many people ...

Those of us who wear poppies and set aside part of November 11 to remember are sometimes accused of glorifying war, but that has never been my experience.

This is a hard day for the old woman who tells the chapter of her life when she was young and in love and engaged to a young pilot in the RCAF. She worked in a strategy section and placed pins in a map to show where the planes were when they were in flight over Europe. She talks of being at her post when her fiancé called in, “I’ve been hit and I’m going down,” then he gave the quadrants of his position.

“I’ve marked that,” was all she said in reply as her heart broke into a million pieces. I met her 55 years later and it was still hard for her to tell that story - not glorification but loss and grief and a penetrating sense of what might have been.

This is a hard day, 100 years after the conclusion of the “War to end all Wars.”

Where were you when War was declared?

Pearl Harbour?

End of war in Europe? or Japan?

Do you remember these events?

Kelly Charlton shared that his great-grandmother lost nine sons in World War One, one alone came home to their little village in the southern part

of England. One dreads to think she would not have been alone in that village to suffer that horrendous loss.

In World War Two, both my father and father-in-law were volunteers. My father-in-law served with the Essex Scottish regiment out of southern Ontario and was captured on the beaches at Normandy. For one year he was missing and presumed dead, then he was located in a POW camp by the Red Cross in France. For the rest of his life, Nov 11 was a hard day.

Over the course of the war, more than **1.1 million Canadians** served in the Canadian Army, Royal Canadian Navy, Royal Canadian Air Force, and in forces across the Commonwealth. More than 44,000 lost their lives and 54,000 were wounded.

Maybe you are able to recall the Korean Conflict?

Herb Pitts served in the Korean conflict, and was only in his young 20's when he was awarded a medal for bravery and leadership. We sometimes hear of that conflict as if there was little impact for us as Canadians. It was short, I guess, from 1950-1953. But did you know that 516 Canadians were killed? For their families, today is a hard day.

A generation later, it was the war in Southeast Asia. Canadians volunteered to serve in Vietnam. More than 30,000 served there with over 130 killed. For so many Americans those memories are hard ones and we honour our volunteers who served. Today, flowers are being placed at the Vietnam memorial war in Washington, DC.

Canada spent an estimated \$18 billion fighting in Afghanistan and trying to reconstruct the country. The war took the lives of 158 Canadian soldiers and wounded more than 1,800 others. Seven Canadian civilians were also killed – a diplomat, four aid workers, a government contractor and a journalist.

THAT is why we hear the strongest calls for peace from veterans.

When people in Europe learned of the armistice on Nov. 11, 1918, many celebrated by rushing to churches to ring the bells that were silenced during the war. News of the end of fighting in the First World War travelled through Europe, in part, by the eruption of church bells that people rang in celebration. A century later, bells in communities across Canada will chime 100 times this Sunday to mark each year since the armistice.

The Royal Canadian Legion is encouraging spiritual centres to take part in “Bells of Peace” on Sunday and so we did. There are similar programs in the U.K., the U.S. and Australia.

"We just want to emulate [the bells in Europe] as a tribute to those that fell and gave us the ability to be here and enjoy what we have today. It would be nice to think that we could stop for a moment and reflect, [on] those grandmothers, those grandfathers, those mums, dads, uncles, brothers and sisters. If it wasn't for the sacrifices they made we wouldn't be speaking today. It would be a completely different world."

- Chief Petty Officer Ben Broome

I heard on a talk radio show this week that kids aren't learning about November 11 or the 100th anniversary. A teacher called in angry!!

“We all had assemblies!”

“Students put markers on graves!”

“They are learning the stories of the soldiers.”

“Some are in France right now.”

Broome said it aims to create a wave of remembrance across the country.

Remembering, learning,

Sharing, weeping.

Passing along stories, holding them in our hearts.

Remembering the sacrifice of individuals which endures, even when the cause for which they fought, no longer does.

Can you share a memory of that conflict? Did you lose someone? Is there a great uncle or grandfather buried at sea? In Europe? Vimy Fridge? In a memorial cenotaph far, far from the home left behind?

One hundred years is a long time.

The names here on our walls are from the Congregational Church, from First Presbyterian and Metropolitan Methodist church.

But those are just a few of the names we gathered today could add - maybe our ancestors who weren't here at that time. Maybe they were in another part of Canada or the Dominion of Newfoundland. Or elsewhere in this good Earth.

Thank you, Joan, for the pictures. Youthful faces - it hardly bears thinking about what they faced in that war - we saw that at Herb's service.

The 2018 National Silver Cross Mother is Anita Cenerini. Mrs. Cenerini's son, Private Thomas Welch, was a respected member of 6 Platoon, November Company, through the training and deployment to Afghanistan in August, 2003, where he served as a C9 Gunner. Less than three months after returning from Afghanistan, Thomas died by suicide in Petawawa, ON. His death on May 8, 2004, is marked as the first death by suicide of a Canadian Soldier after returning home from the Afghanistan mission.

What does the sacred spirit want you to bring to mind this day? The scripture directs our thoughts and prayers. There is only one Canadian name on the memorial in Rangoon, but so many others were lost or critically affected - remember the list? Poets, artists, musicians - written

in a time when to lose a battle was to be a slave, the scribe asks us to broaden our assessment of the costs of war, in effect, to gain energy for the fight for peace.

Let us end with a wartime song. As we heard Mary practice *We'll Meet Again* on Thursday night, the choir began to hum along during the second chorus. If you'd like to, I invite you to do the same this morning.