

Sermon for Sunday – November 6, 2022  
Remembrance Sunday - John 11:17-35

Prayer: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you O God, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

My mother wasn't very old when her brother died. She was the youngest of eight children and he was the first born. The story goes that he was 21 years old with a lovely girlfriend waiting for him to return after the war - they planned to marry and live happily ever after. Kenneth was in the Air Force, a gunner. His plane was shot down over Germany – the news of his death came to his mother – my grandmother on Christmas eve. She told no one until boxing day – times were hard enough – she didn't want everyone's Christmas to be ruined, so she kept the news of the death of her eldest son to herself.

When the war was over there was a huge boom economically, marriage rates skyrocketed and babies were born. Some returning from war were – dubbed heroes – some given land and privileges to help them move along. After the war - was a very prosperous time.

But many who returned from that war, came home changed; aged beyond their years, they had seen things and done things. Some came home wounded physically and some wounded in ways you could not see but you could feel.

Quickly society forgot about the happy go lucky joker who left for war but who returned, sombre and melancholy. We swept aside those who came home to horrific nightmares, deep depression, and feelings of disconnection from reality. We ignored the fact that many of those returning from war, chose to self medicated, using alcohol and drugs to dull their pain. We turned away from the fact that divorce rate also skyrocketed

during this time and many children grew up without the benefit of a healthy father. We forgot that many children took on the role of parent to their parent as the adult struggled with addiction and mental health issues.

Studies show that living in a war-torn country during World War II was consistently associated with having poorer health later in life. Those who experienced war were 3 percentage points more likely to have diabetes as adults and 5.8 percentage points more likely to have depression. In addition, people exposed to the war had lower education levels as adults, and took more years to acquire an education, they were less likely to marry, and were less satisfied with their lives as older adults (RAND Corporation)

World War II was, arguably, the most significant and influential event of the twentieth century. The devastation is almost incalculable: total military and civilian deaths are estimated at 70 to 85 million, about 3% of the global population during that time. WWII That war changed everything and it has had a multi generational impact.///

Friends I know this “21 century” is fairly new but it feels to me that the world has experienced another significant and influential event that will have multi generational consequences. Covid has changed us all.

Now, I know it feels like the world is done with Covid or at least figured out how to manage it. And I know that people are getting together again and weddings are happening and babies are being born and many of us are patting ourselves on the back for having survived but let us not forget that we have all experienced a traumatic event and traumatic events change us. Studies show that traumatic events even change our brain chemistry – such events alter the fabric of who we are. That is big. //

Two weeks ago as I listened to Brian Walton's sermon about remnant church – he is so wise – he is right we are a remnant of who we used to be individuals and as church but God is all about using remnants to transform the world.

Last week as I listened to Ron McConnell's sermon about being a people who need to look through the windshield and, though checking the rear-view mirror is important, there is a reason the windshield is so much bigger than the rear-view mirror. He reminded us that we are to look forward - with great love – to find our way. Ron too is wise.

This week I want to remind us - as we acknowledge that though we are a blessed remnant people – and a people who need to look through the windshield to our future - we are also a different people than we were 2 1/2 years ago. We are different because we have moved through a traumatic event. We are different individually and corporately.

It seems to me that many of us are having trouble pulling ourselves up by our own boot straps these days, many of us are struggling with depression, or low energy – some of us are just managing to get through the day little own dealing with something extra. Many of us are finding our anger fuse is shorter than it use to be and we are less gentle with ourselves and others. Many of us are struggling to make simple decisions, we live with a new level of suspicion of others, and we are feeling unsafe in the world. What we are feeling is not a failure of character or spirit - but rather the result of a significant event. We have been changed by what we have been through.

Trauma is not something that happens only to soldiers or emergency responders. I did some research and discovered that The Canadian Psychological Association reports 76% of the population have experienced at least one traumatic event in their lifetime. About 1 in 10 Canadians will meet the criteria for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder over their lifetime.

Trauma is a ***natural response*** to an event that overwhelms our capacity to cope. Trauma responses are individual & diverse and results in cognitive, physical, emotional, behavioral, and spiritual symptoms that affect well-being.

- **Individual trauma** is defined as "a blow to the psyche that breaks through one's defenses so suddenly and with such brutal force that one cannot react to it effectively."
- **Collective trauma** is "a blow to the basic tissues of social life that damages the bonds attaching people together and impairs the prevailing sense of community." (Erikson, 1972)

The COVID pandemic was a global, universally-experienced disaster resulting in individual & collective trauma and while depth of the consequences of this event depended on access to resources, **everyone** was affected to some degree.

Communities of faith, our churches experienced trauma responses related to lockdowns, mask mandates, service cancellations, inability to gather for celebrations of mourning, technology demands, social isolation, conflict over health decisions, financial stressors, just to name a few.

In our gospel lesson today we hear of Jesus walking into a Trauma. A loving family has been torn apart by grief. Lazarus has died and Mary and Martha are struggling to cope with the loss. There is sadness and there is anger. Both Mary and Martha are convinced that if Jesus had shown up earlier Lazarus would not have died and so though he is their friend there is an undertone of frustration. There is without doubt and hint of fear as they considered - what the future would hold for them after all Lazarus, was probably the breadwinner for their family. Martha and Mary are not married nor did they have sons, they would be economically disadvantage given Lazarus's death. Loss of a loved one is a trauma – a blow to the psyche that breaks through ones' defenses. There is anger, confusion, sadness, denial, and a deep desire to set things right again.

Though the story suggests that Jesus' already knew that it was going to be okay - that Lazarus was going to be restored - he doesn't jump to the happy ending. The story tells us he is moved by the emotional outpouring of the crowds and of Mary and Martha and Jesus weeps. He embraces Mary and Martha, he stands with them, feels with them, listens to them and weeps with them. It is after Jesus has experienced their grief and his own grief that he begins to work to create something new.

Friends we have a God that is good at being with hurt, discouraged and traumatized people. The Bible is filled with stories of people who have come through horrendous and difficult things. Biblical Story tellers tell us of a God that did not abandon them but stood with them, listened to them. wept with them and then worked to move them to a new place of abundant joy. From the people of Israel who came out of slavery to the woman left to face a hostile crowd armed with stones and self righteous anger. We have a God that was there when the people of Israel when released from their

slavery and who was there with the woman who was to be stoned – turning things around.

You and I live in interesting times. We are both traumatized and wounded and we are the hands and feet of God, called to grieve with those who grieve, to weep, to hold and to be present in the hard work of healing and finding abundance and joy.

Friends we are uniquely located in the world. Wounded healers. These are not easy times but I believe that we, as the people of God, we are needed in this world - in this moment more than we ever have been.

It seems to me we have two jobs one is to work on our own healing, to rest when we need to, to be gentle with ourselves, to seek supportive community and safe places. And we are to be a source of healing for others.

This all seems possible because we have been told - and we know at the core of our being - that we have a God who holds us, listens to us and weeps with us. Who moves with us creating something new, abundance even joyful.

Thanks be to God.

Amen

## Pastoral Prayer – November 8, 2020 – Remembrance Sunday

God of love, we open our hearts to you now in prayer.

We open our hearts with Thanksgiving:

We give you thanks for this winter day, for the crispness of the air which awakens us to the beauty and strength of creation and our place within it.

We give you thanks for our communities of faith that support each of us as we move through life.

We give you thanks for our communities of faith that works to support others; beyond our walls as they move through life.

We give you thanks for the country in which we live, a country that does its best to acknowledge it's mistakes and where we work together towards reconciliation and where we value peace with justice.

We give you thanks for those, who despite their fears are still willing to be open to your call to defend others with their very lives and we give you thanks for those who years ago, stood against evil and who gave up their lives in the quest for good.

God of healing, we pray for those among us who are sick, those who are suffering, those who are lonely.

We pray for those who are grieving, especially we remember this morning those who will always mourn the parent, or the spouse, or the sibling, or the child, who did not come home from war.

We pray for those who are hungry and for those who are homeless.

Especially for those whose homes and livelihoods have been destroyed by fighting. We pray for refugees everywhere - may all know rest and peace and a sense of home once again.

God of peace, we pray for peace not just for ourselves but for all your people, of every nation. We pray that conversations might prevail over anger, love might prevail over hatred, and that the search for justice might prevail over the quest for retribution.

Finally, O God, give us the strength to work for the things that we pray for. Use us, we pray, to remind others that we are all one family here on this planet and that we need to work together – caring for each other and the earth.

Use us, we pray, to wipe away the tears from our neighbor's face.

Use us we pray to bring about your peace - a time when nation shall not lift up sword against nation and we shall not learn war anymore.

We pray all these things in the name of Jesus who taught us to pray together  
And so we echo Jesus prayer using the words on our screens:

**Eternal Spirit,  
Earth -Maker, Pain-bearer, Life-giver,  
Source of all that is and that shall be:  
Father and Mother of us all,  
Loving God in whom is heaven:**

**The hallowing of your name echo through the universe!  
The way of your justice be followed  
by peoples of the world!  
Your heavenly will be done  
by all created beings!  
Your commonwealth of peace and freedom  
sustain our hope and come on earth.**

**With the bread we need for today, feed us.  
In the hurts we absorb from one another, forgive us.  
In the times of temptation and test, strengthen us.  
From trials too great to endure, spare us.  
From the grip of all that is evil, free us.  
For you reign in the glory of the power that is love,  
now and for ever.  
Amen.**