

GRATITUDE

November 11, 2018

Pentecost 25

[Psalm 127](#)

[Mark 12:38-44](#)

(prayer)

Today, it has been 100 years since the guns fell silent at the end of the Great War / The War to End All Wars / later called World War One. Among the Commonwealth Countries, recognition of this armistice is known as Remembrance Day: a day to remember those who died in war as well as honour current members of the armed forces and veterans.

In Canada, November 11th is a solemn day of remembrance. South of the border November 11th focuses on celebrating veterans and current military service-people (Americans honour *their* war dead in May: Memorial Day.)

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Appreciating all that is sacrificed in time of war is a central theme to remembrance day.

War leaves impacts: not just in lost lives and scared cities and landscapes, but in separated families, PTSD, and more.

In addition to remembering those who have perished during UN peacekeeping missions, Canadians primarily remember service-members who have made the ultimate sacrifice during our nation's official participation in five wars: the Boer War, WW1, WW2, the Korean Conflict and the War in Afghanistan.

Seldom is there unanimous public opinion that participating in a particular conflict is necessary or wise - but always, when the guns fell silent, there is a universal hope that peace will endure.

I think that is why we set aside the end of a war as a day of remembrance, and not the start of the hostilities.

What we want to hold *front of mind* is the promise of peace. If peace endures, then we can say with greater confidence that the various wartime sacrifices were *somehow* worth it.

WW1 was so uniquely devastating:

- The number of nations involved (including citizen soldiers from lands far away from the battlefields);
- Brutal trench warfare;
- Chemical weapons;
- The introduction of air bombing;

that after the 11th hour on the 11th day of the 11th month, 1918, there was a honest effort to make it, literally, *the last war: the war to end all wars*. The league of nations was created as an attempt to ensure a lasting peace: that the sacrifices (at home and abroad) of the Great War were not in vain.

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We are grateful for sacrificial giving.

We are grateful for legacies passed from one generation to the next. The 127th Psalm speaks of the promises and hope that we pass on to future generations and how that is a blessing in the present.

Rev. T. Blaine Gregg

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We are part of a long line of *quivers filled with arrows*. At some point, we were part of that future generation given the legacy to carry; in retrospect, we honour the mentorship of those who have shown and taught us the value of generosity.

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Psalm 127's basic theme is broader than simply hoping for a big family. It is a reminder to appreciate the centrality of god in everyday life.

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To bring a bit of spirituality into wedding services I conduct, I often begin by quoting the first verse of 127th Psalm: *Unless God builds the house, those who build it labour in vain*.

I then go on to point out that I don't take this verse overly literally: *I doubt that the psalmist is promoting God as a building contractor. I think the psalmist wants us to see that, as God is involved in the significant constructions of our life, they have great value and integrity.*

Building healthy and strong relationships is serious work - true in marriage, in the church, with friends, within and between nations, and in our lives in general.

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I have mentioned before... that the way my personality has evolved, I tend to be a *planner*. This has advantages and serves me well (and groups that I am involved in): I take joy in working towards a goal and eventually getting there.

Even so, I am aware that (unless I am being especially mindful), I am the kind of a person who can miss what is important around me *-in the moment-* because I am focusing on a step or two ahead.

I need to hear the wisdom that Yoda shared about Luke Skywalker: *All his life has he looked away: to the future, to the horizon. Never his mind on where...he...was.*

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I am trying to practice appreciating *the moment of now*. I am trying to appreciate the little things. The little things matter... in and of themselves... and because small things add up.

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In 1990, Shirley Murray wrote a marvelous little hymn text. It was included in the 1996 Voices United hymn book (#361):

*Small things count, so Jesus said:
cups of water, crumbs of bread,
small things done because we're kind
count as big things in God's mind.*

*Small things make the big things grow:
yeast that bubbles in the dough,
puffs that fill a big balloon,
notes that make a happy tune.*

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Rev. T. Blaine Gregg

Some of you know that I was a Commissioner to this past summer's General Council meeting of the United Church of Canada. The two topics that caught the most attention out of GC43 were:

- 1) the formal approval of creating a new three level church structure out of the current four level system; and
- 2) an impromptu dialogue about experiences of racism within the church.

One of the things that was easy to miss was a proposal that passed instructing the General Council to *establish the role of an Equity Monitor for future meetings, events or workshops to ensure a barrier-free, equitable opportunity for all participants. An Equity Monitor would assist in identifying gaps or barriers and act as a liaison between individuals and the General Council and its structures.*

By approving this Equity Monitor proposal, GC43 was proclaiming that there is a commitment within the church to live out our compassion as deeply as possible.

At the national (denominational) level at least, there will be someone whose focus will be to look closely at the set-up, style, communication, etc. for gathering to ensure that *everyone* will be able to participate as fully as possible. This can be as simple as making sure voices can be heard, visuals can be seen - including that alternative opportunities can be added for those with hearing or eyesight challenges. It also includes ensuring that physical spaces are inviting, accessible, safe. And that people feel welcomed and included emotionally. An equity monitor would ensure that events are organized in ways that are sensitive to the cultural and language differences that will exist within the group of participants.

Basically, by having someone highlight how we can best address the little things will have a positive effect on the whole gathering.

It is not like the church has ignored some of these needs in the past. It has become common place in large wider church meetings (GC, Conference) for people to be sitting at table groups to facilitate more conversation and understanding. As much as possible, *round tables* are used, to eliminate any appearance of hierarchy.

Hear at St. David's when we purchased new chairs for the CD wing, besides having strong, comfortable chairs, we also wanted them to be relatively easy to store and carry. We already had a good inventory of foldable tables, but to supplement that, along with all new chairs, we got a few eight person round tables.

We made good use of those tables a week ago, when our church hosted a breakfast gathering of various local agencies for a community dialogue to help St. David's learn what priorities and needs are out there.

If you happen to be at the church on a third Wednesday evening, and walk in on your church council, you will see that (typically) the rectangular tables are arranged in a circle - no head table or obvious places of honour.

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Showing equity and living out equity might seem like an obvious, small thing, but it can send a huge message.

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As we continue our way through Year B of the Revised Common Lectionary, we are hearing *mostly* from the gospel of Mark. A month ago ([October 14](#)), you may remember hearing that Jesus had a conversation with a wealthy, young man about what was needed to do to ensure a place in the Realm of God. When challenged to set aside his social status and position of privilege, the gospel writer notes that the young man went away in shock and grief.

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Rev. T. Blaine Gregg

Today, we have moved a few chapters further into Mark to explore Jesus teaching (again) about the false prominence of inequity.

First it was a critique against the *status-conscience scribes* who like to stand out by praying loud prayers meant to impress and, by walking around in their fancy robes and, by grabbing the best seats in worship services and at public feasts.

Then, one day, sitting with his disciples at the temple, Jesus drew their attention to the offering boxes. By placing this story right after the comment about the scribes, Mark might be implying to the gospel readers that some of the givers were making their offering as a public display of their wealth... picture each large coin being clinked into box (one at a time) for everyone to see and hear. Then, Jesus comments on with the old woman putting in her two pennies (which barely make a sound) and walking away.

The truth is... [Jesus said] *that this widow gave more from her life than everyone else put together.*

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Classic *bait and switch* preaching from Jesus: allow people to make a pre-judgment on a situation and then turn it all upside down.

- The person at the front of the line is not always *first*!
- The most well dressed person is not the only one to focus on!
- The person sitting in the best seat is not necessarily the most important one in the room!
- Don't assume that the biggest giver has given the most!

Jesus does this all the time:

- Let the children come to me!
- Let someone without sin, throw the first stone!
- Zacchaeus, can I come to your place for supper, tonight?

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The widow's gift was inconsequential from a budget balancing perspective, but her dedication and generosity was grand by comparison! Jesus is not really challenging the generosity of the other givers, but he is pointing out that giving from one's excess is not the same as sacrificial giving. In a way, the widow was (literally) offering a bit of herself. Her gift affected her life, more than the larger gifts offered by her fellow worshippers.

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The small things count.

There is holy value in honouring the blessings of this moment: to appreciate what *now* gives us. Small things add up.

One of my favorite quotes is attributed to Margaret Mead: "*Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.*"

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The big offerings are easy to notice.

But the small, incremental sacrifices can be equally world changing.

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I guess a message in all of this is... honour gratitude at every level.

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I'm going to make my point succinctly today.

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Rev. T. Blaine Gregg

Never worry about whether a small sacrifice is worth anything.

It always is.

Let's remember that!

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Let us pray:

God of hope, lead all who are vulnerable to your sanctuary of hope, where they will know true welcome. May we be guide posts along that way. Amen.

#78MV "God Weeps"

Rev. T. Blaine Gregg