

New St. James Presbyterian Church, London, Ontario
Sunday, November 6, 2016
Rev. Andrew Reid
Haggai 2:1-9; Hebrews 11:29-12:2; Matthew 5:3-11
“To seek a newer world”

I am one of the fortunate ones – more fortunate than I sometimes think we know – who have never been at war.

I am an early baby boomer. I was born several years after the end of the Second World War. I was too young to know anything about the Korean conflict. Conflicts in Kenya, Cyprus and Aden took place during my childhood, but they were strange, far away things. The Vietnam war had no immediate impact on the life of a teenager in a little mining village in Scotland. Even though I was living in Scotland, the violence of the conflict in Northern Ireland was something quite remote. The Falklands campaign and the Gulf Wars were far away and anyway, by that time, I was too old ever to be considered for military service.

So the closest I have ever come to being at war is what I have seen on the television news and read in the newspapers. Oh yes, a high school classmate went into the Royal Air Force, and a classmate from seminary spent a short time as an army chaplain, first with the Parachute Regiment and then with the Black Watch. They served, but to the best of my knowledge, they never actually went to war.

As I say, I am one of the fortunate ones who have never been at war. I would like to think that I might be just the first of many who will never have to experience war, but I fear that may be a pipe dream.

But still today, I wear my poppy. Still today, I lead this Remembrance service. Still today, I know I will be moved as the Remembrance wreath is brought forward with dignity, and placed before us with respect. I hope I will do justice to Lieutenant Colonel John MacRae's words when I read In Flanders Fields. My voice may well crack as I read the honour roll of New St James. These are the names of men who, as the memorial plaques here in the sanctuary say, when their king and country needed them, answered the call to uphold on the field of battle, the honour of home, empire and civilization, men who sacrificed their lives for king and empire in the cause of freedom. And I know that the singing will never be more proud or strong or heartfelt than when in a few minutes we sing the Royal Anthem and the National Anthem. As we remember this Remembrance Sunday.

The experience of being at war is strange to me. But I know it is not strange to many of you. Many of you, I know, remember living in war-torn places. Many of you remember people who suffered and who still suffer the after-effects of war. Many of you remember people who went off to war and never came home. And of behalf of myself and of all the others who

have been as fortunate as I have been, I want to say that we have not forgotten, that we will not forget – at the going down of the sun and in the morning, we will remember them.

But not only have we not forgotten, not only will we not forget – we must commit ourselves to work for the things for which they went to war. For life. For peace. For justice. For freedom. For democracy. For integrity. For a better life. For a better world.

For the kind of world of which Haggai spoke – a world in which heavens, earth, sea, dry land and all the nations may be shaken, but in which the house of the Lord will be filled with splendour. *And the latter splendour of this house shall be greater than the former, says the Lord of hosts; and in this place I will give prosperity, says the Lord of hosts* Haggai 2:6-9. Haggai was speaking to encourage his people, to inspire his people, specifically to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem. But we may take his words and apply them in the wider context of the world as God's house.

And in that context, we must commit ourselves to work for life, peace, justice, freedom, democracy, integrity, a better life, a better world.

Especially today we must commit ourselves to work for these things. For to remember is to act. And to choose not to act is to choose to forget.

One of the few pieces of poetry that I can still recite from memory is part of Alfred, Lord Tennyson's poem, Ulysses. In a reflective monologue, the old king Ulysses looks back on his life, and declares his determination to do what he calls "some work of noble note" e'er the end. His closing words speak to us today about remembering and acting.

Come, my friends.

'Tis not too late to seek a newer world.

Push off, and sitting well in order smite

The sounding furrows; for my purpose holds

To sail beyond the sunset, and the baths

Of all the western stars, until I die.

It may be that the gulfs will wash us down;

It may be we shall touch the Happy Isles,

And see the great Achilles, whom we knew.

Tho' much is taken, much abides; and tho'

We are not now that strength which in old days

Moved earth and heaven, that which we are, we are,--

One equal temper of heroic hearts,

Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will

To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.