

St. John's, NL

November 7 - 11, 2011

Rev. Dr. Jonathan Dent

Monday, November 7

Welcome again to Meditation. On this week which culminates in 11-11-11-11-11, no, that's not a problem in our recording, we will be looking at the significance of Remembrance Day, the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month, and this year in the eleventh year. Why do we take such time to remember? Why don't we stop remembering wars and awful losses such as what Newfoundland and Canada have endured? As a clergyperson once asked me twenty years ago, when will we stop marking the World Wars in this way?

I will be exploring what our options are during this week in Meditation. Because we can choose to forget what has happened, to deny it, to ignore it or simply to be distracted by other things. I will argue against these options, but we can choose other options, just as we can choose to de-Christianize Christmas and Easter. But we do so at our peril.

It is said that those who choose not to remember historical lessons are forced to confront again what had to be learned at great cost in the past. This is perhaps part of the reason we remember and choose to remember. The Scriptures also encourage remembering, particularly remembering what God has done in the past and what God is doing today. I assume this is one of the main reasons for having this broadcast, to remember what God has done for us in the past and to depend on what God is doing today, for me to be a changed person and all of society to be affected by that. Today I want to read from Deuteronomy 8, which has as its context Moses trying to get the people to remember, and follow God today.

¹ Be careful to follow every command I am giving you today, so that you may live and increase and may enter and possess the land the LORD promised on oath to your ancestors.² Remember how the LORD your God led you all the way in the wilderness these forty years, to humble and test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands.³ He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your ancestors had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.⁴ Your clothes did not wear out and your feet

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did not swell during these forty years. ⁵ Know then in your heart that as a man disciplines his son, so the LORD your God disciplines you.

⁶ Observe the commands of the LORD your God, walking in obedience to him and revering him. ⁷ For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land—a land with brooks, streams, and deep springs gushing out into the valleys and hills; ⁸ a land with wheat and barley, vines and fig trees, pomegranates, olive oil and honey; ⁹ a land where bread will not be scarce and you will lack nothing; a land where the rocks are iron and you can dig copper out of the hills.

¹⁰ When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the LORD your God for the good land he has given you. ¹¹ Be careful that you do not forget the LORD your God, failing to observe his commands, his laws and his decrees that I am giving you this day. ¹² Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, ¹³ and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, ¹⁴ then your heart will become proud and you will forget the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

Let us choose today to humble ourselves before God and not forget what God has done for us who want to trust God, here in St. John's, in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Tuesday, November 8

This week we are considering all the reasons why we remember...remember the wars, the soldiers who fought in them, remember the freedoms won during and after major wars. As a culture, there is a strong urge to forget. We tell ourselves that time heals wounds, when it does not. We tell ourselves to forgive and forget. But only one part of that formula is in Scripture...the forgiving part.

Forgetting happens to some of us, of all ages. We forget names, glasses, keys, wallets, purses, cell phones, you name it we forget it. Some of us have even greater difficulties in remembering, and we cannot remember things in the short term, while longer term memory helps us remember those events

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which occurred so long ago. Some of us have diseases that have stolen our memories. These are a terrible plague and one of the most de-humanizing things of all things that can happen to us. My father had the progressive super nuclear palsy, which took his brain functions, which in turn took his bodily functions before he died. All of you dealing with those who have memory difficulties certainly need our prayers and lots of patience and kindness to deal with individuals in this challenging deficit.

Forgetting for those with some disease affecting their memory is not an option. It is a reality. For us, we can choose to mark the occasions that are important to us, birthdays, anniversaries, baptismal anniversaries, and the great festivals throughout the year, such as Thanksgiving. We can choose to remember.

Remembrance Day is a form of generational remembering. Most of us were not even alive during WWI and those who remember WWII are getting up in years. But we can remember what our parents and grandparents have told us and other ancestors. We can read about what happened to those generations. We can choose to be grateful for what they did for us during those years. We can choose to be grateful to God. Who knows what would have happened to the world if the Kaiser or Hitler had won? So we seek to remember across the generations to be thankful to God and to remember what so many did to give us the freedoms we enjoy.

We can choose to forget and no longer mark Nov. 11 or any other day. But we do so at our own peril. And even more important than this is what we read from Deuteronomy 8: 11-18:

¹¹ Be careful that you do not forget the LORD your God, failing to observe his commands, his laws and his decrees that I am giving you this day. ¹² Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, ¹³ and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, ¹⁴ then your heart will become proud and you will forget the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. ¹⁵ He led you through the vast and dreadful wilderness, that thirsty and waterless land, with its venomous snakes and scorpions. He brought you water out of hard

rock. ¹⁶ He gave you manna to eat in the wilderness, something your ancestors had never known, to humble and test you so that in the end it might go well with you. ¹⁷ You may say to yourself, "My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me." ¹⁸ But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your ancestors, as it is today.

Let us turn from praising our own abilities and our own hands, to thanking God, not because we understand all that has happened in history, but because we want to trust God anew today.

Wednesday, November 9

We are continuing to consider why it is we devote a season, or a week or at least a day to remembering. I suppose it is good to take a few moments to remember why we remember. Because it would be easy to forget, to choose not to mark the occasion, to deny the painful realities that confront us as we look into history and into ourselves.

The reality of choosing to deny the warfare and aggressive conflict that has been a part of humanity since almost the beginning confronts us during this time. We can choose to deny that millions lost their lives in the First and Second Wars, and millions since in various smaller wars across the planet.

We sometimes forget how broken we are as human beings. We sometimes forget how sinful and rebellious to God and God's ways we are. Murder and death were not God's original plan, according to the Scriptures. God wanted a harmonious existence for us all. But beginning with the rebellion at Eden, culminating with Eden's first married couple's son killing their other son introduced violent bloodshed into the history of humanity at a very early stage. We can deny this story as we deny other stories, but as we forget these realities we can forget our own sin and tendency to choose broken, hurtful ways, against God, ourselves and others.

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This is in part why most worship services have as a mandatory part of the liturgy, a time for the confession of our sins. This is not to wallow in our sins, nor to encourage ourselves in greater sinfulness, but to remember and to choose another way. Sometimes how we have sinned and how we have been sinned against are almost too much for us to admit. We often deny what we have done to others, what we have done to ourselves. We often deny what has been done to us, because it is too hurtful, too painful to acknowledge. But as we have the courage to acknowledge what has happened to us, we can begin to consider forgiveness and freedom from the pain that keeps us in bondage.

Remembering the wars and the abuses of the wars is painful. It would be easier to deny what happened there. It would be easier to deny the holocaust, the mass deportation, the mass murder of other peoples, of the bombings, of the use of atomic bombs, mustard gas, depleted uranium, and other atrocities over the years. It would be easier to not note that we have done this to ourselves. But we have.

And those who are abuse survivors, whether physical, emotional or sexual abuse, know the realities of the courage it takes to come out of denial to acknowledge what has been done to them. Whether it is personal, or generational, it is painful. But we take time, not to say we will do it again and again, but that we will remember to change our lives to something better, something more God pleasing.

Denial helps us as a defense against the pain, but eventually such defense only hinders us from remembering, forgiving, and moving on in our lives.

So we remember that God is for us. We don't know why we have to go through everything we have gone through. But the Scriptures remind us from Romans 8, as we often read at funerals as we confront our losses there: ³¹ What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³² He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? ³³ Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand

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of God and is also interceding for us. ³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?³⁶ As it is written:

“For your sake we face death all day long;
we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.”

³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹ neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Thursday, November 10

This week we are looking at why we remember during Remembrance Day week, and what we have if we choose not to remember. We have already talked about the choice to try and forget. But when we forget, we lose touch with reality and even worse, we lose touch with God. Forgetting God in the midst of all that has done to win political freedom is a grave error. It's difficult to try and forget. Some say forgive and forget. But in fact, we do remember. Once we forgive, we need to treat the person or persons forgiven as such, and not hold the grievance we have with them over their head constantly. To hold their sin against them is to choose to not forgive, and whether we have forgotten what was done against us or not, we can choose to forgive.

We can also choose to deny. But when we deny the terrible, sinful reality of the history of the World Wars, we choose to deny the reality of the human condition, and what has been done to stop individuals bent on violent world domination. We must not deny the millions who lost their lives, as a result of the holocaust, or as a result of fighting in the wars. We want peace, peace within ourselves, peace in our world. Sometimes we have fought for such.

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We can also choose to ignore the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month. This is and always will be an individual decision. Even those who wear the military uniform have a choice to remember those who have gone before or not. We all have that choice.

Some say "ignorance is bliss." Never knowing is one thing. Trying to ignore that which was done for us, even if we never asked for it to be done on our behalf, is an exercise in futility. We do much to ignore that which disturbs us. Remembrance Day frankly is disturbing. If you take in just a portion of what is going on, for the lives lost, the communities and countries severely changed forever, then you know what I am talking about. We can try to ignore it. We can pretend as if it didn't happen. But does this help us in any way? Some say, "keep the past in the past." I often wonder if this is because it takes so much courage to face what happened in the past. We ask ourselves if lives were wasted. We cannot make that determination. We only know a little about the causes that threatened the entire world in the past. Many sacrifices were made, some more conscious than others.

So then some try to distract themselves from the reality of the losses. Many in the forces turned to drinking, smoking and gambling. My father was one of these, who served with the merchant marine. I do not judge him, because as a teenager in WWII, he did the best he could to survive and send back a little money to his poor family. But certainly many addictions are based on the need to be distracted from the pain, suffering and life changing losses that one encounters in the midst of war. Most, if not all, saw way more than what any young man or woman should ever see. Distractions then take the place of these horrific recollections.

One of the devil's names is said to be the lord of the flies. He is supposed to keep us distracted constantly from the important matters of life, spiritual and otherwise, by a constant small buzzing in our ears. We can choose in these moments, whether in our home, or in a vehicle on the road or wherever we are to say, "no" to the constant buzzing of rebellion against God. We can say 'yes' to remembering how much God has done for us in Jesus Christ, for his ultimate sacrifice. We can remember right now to say 'thank you,' to God in Jesus for being able to have a relationship with God and a chance to live as freely as we do. Paul says it this way in Romans 5:6ff:

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You see, at just the right time when we were still powerless Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

So we choose anew this day to receive that which we could NOT accomplish for ourselves, life in Jesus' name.

Friday, November 11

Today is a day of remembering. The Bible is full of commands to remember. Mostly this is so we will not forget God, and God's ways. In Deuteronomy, Moses often calls the people to remember what they have gone through in their lives. The summary verse 7 in chapter 32 of Deuteronomy says, "Remember the days of old; consider the generations long past. Ask your father and he will tell you, your elders, and they will explain to you."

Moses wanted to make sure the people wouldn't forget what they went through in the desert of their lives, how they had been rescued from sin, how God had miraculously provided for their food and clothing in the middle of nowhere. He wanted them to pass this down to their children. He wanted them to remember first of all their relationship and love for God. Then he wanted them to teach their children about this. Moses says in Deuteronomy 11:1-7:

¹ Love the LORD your God and keep his requirements, his decrees, his laws and his commands always. ² Remember today that your children were not the ones who saw and experienced the discipline of the LORD your God: his majesty, his mighty hand, his outstretched arm; ³ the signs he performed and the things he did in the heart of Egypt, both to Pharaoh king of Egypt and to his whole country; ⁴ what he did to the Egyptian army, to its horses and chariots, how he overwhelmed them with the waters of the Red Sea^[a] as they were pursuing you, and how the LORD brought lasting ruin on them. ⁵ It was not your children who saw what he did for you in the wilderness until you arrived at this place, ⁶ and what he did to Dathan and Abiram, sons of

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Eliab the Reubenite, when the earth opened its mouth right in the middle of all Israel and swallowed them up with their households, their tents and every living thing that belonged to them. ⁷ But it was your own eyes that saw all these great things the LORD has done.

We cannot force others, our children, or anyone, to believe. We cannot force anyone to remember what we are to remember this day. We can tell people what it means for us personally to trust the Lord, and what God has done in our lives. We can invite people to remember what many in our families, in our communities, in our nations have done to sacrifice for our freedom.

We do not know how long these November 11 services will continue. We know that it is possible to forget, to deny the terrible things that happened, the sacrifices. We know it is possible to ignore these services and not take part on these days, while taking time off from work because it is a holiday. We can distract ourselves with many other things, many types of entertainment, many other interests in our lives.

But we also can choose to remember. The poppy is just a symbol of remembering. There are many other plaques and books and monuments to help us remember.

So I invite you to choose to remember, not because you have to, or because it is your only option. Rather, you can thank God for what you have in this life. You can choose gratitude. You can remember.

If you have missed any of the Meditations this week, please feel free to go to St. David's Presbyterian Church website at www.stdavids.nf.ca You can find these messages there. I also invite your response. You can contact me there at the church as well.

Let us pray.

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