

St. David's Presbyterian Church
St. John's, NL
"Ready to Go Home"
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Remembrance Sunday

Who would you call if you had one last call to make before dying? What would you say? Most of those types of calls, such as the ones that were recorded on September 11, 2001 recount touching last moments of making sure that your loved ones knew that you loved them. This was true from the twin towers and from that United flight the passengers took away from the terrorists and it crashed in a field.

Spirituality, like sports, progresses on a day to day basis, where one works out and goes through strengthening exercises, mobility exercises and aerobic exercises, all transferable to the sport strategy or skill. Our spiritual exercises are prayer, the reading and studying of Scripture, loving one another and caring about what God does care about in this life.

Spirituality, like intimate relationships, only works where we have enough time and enough passion, enough interest and enough commitment to make it work. Each of us chooses day by day what our lives will be like. We have choices, although we go routinely to work and to school. We have choices, even if we have made social commitments and health appointments. We choose.

In this part of November, we choose to take some time to remember. We don't have to. We are not being forced to do so. We can and many people do at this time of year choose to ignore or deny or distract ourselves away from the reality of our history of World Wars. It is hard to face that which in many ways the worst of humanity and the best. The worst is bent on complete and total world domination by massive aggression. The best is those who care enough about others to sacrifice themselves to keep them free. And of course, there is much more that is broken about war than these two comments. I have a whole series of insights this week on VOWR at 9 am Monday to Friday and don't really want to give them away right now.

But I do want to talk about why we take time to remember and also about how we take time to make sure we are ready to go home. In brief, we remember so we won't repeat our mistakes of the past. We remember

because we value what we have now, and all those who gave their lives for what we have. We remember because we are grateful to God.

I'm not really sure how it feels to enter a war as a soldier, and to kiss your loved ones good bye, and to get on a ship or a plane and realize you may never again see what you have taken for granted for the whole first part of your life. Some of you have had this experience. And you came back. My father went on ship in the merchant marine as a teenager, he came back and only told me a little bit. My brother was in Vietnam, and never really told me anything, but we read his letters in the late '60s and realized only a little of the trauma he went through.

We are in a spiritual battle, and some day all of us will go home. Of course, some of us may not believe this biblical teaching. But we are in a battle for choosing to know Jesus as Lord, to trust him, to grow in relationship with him. Week by week I try to help us reflect on this central reality. Because the first phone call always goes to the Lord, if we know that this life is over. Then we call those here who care about us. Even if that first call is only, "O God, help!"

There is a battle in our hearts for our attention and our affection and our commitment. Joshua knew that as he challenged the people of God in chapter 24 to know whether they really wanted to serve God or not, to serve God or some other gods, some other cause. He warned them that it would be a battle, literally for them, figuratively for us. He warned them that it would not be easy.

Joshua noted that he could not make their decision for them. He would not force them to choose for God. In some ways, he didn't even want them to say "yes" to God unless they were really ready to lay it on the line for God. He did say that he and his household would serve the Lord.

This today is the same decision for you and your household. No individual can effectively pressure any other individual to faith and trust in God. It simply can't be done. We can only tell others what God is doing in our lives and why we couldn't live without God, if that's true. As we share, we put into words what we know from experience. Others are challenged by this, hopefully in a good and kind way. It is all we have. It is what the Scripture says is "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have." (1 Peter 3:15b)

Joshua led the people into the promised land. Jesus leads us into new life.

This new life is one where we are less afraid about death. Paul talks to the Thessalonians about this life. He doesn't want us to grieve as those who believe that a body goes into the ground or gets burnt up and that's it. He makes it very clear that everyone who dies will some day stand before God. The life on the battlefield and the death there is not the end.

There is more. We will be summoned into the king's presence. We will be summoned by a trumpeter. In that royal audience, we will know that the life we have lived on this earth is not the final chapter of our story. We will see the truth. We will be called to account. And all who trust Jesus will know the beauty of reunion. Others who reject God will be given the desires of their hearts and be separate from God which the Scripture paint in the darkest of colours: hellish, painful realities of separation from life, love and the author of life.

So are you ready to go home? Do you know what you will say to the King?

This is not our home. All believers are from away, in this sense. But there is a great home awaiting us, and an active life beyond this life. Meanwhile, Jesus tells us a story, recorded in Matthew 25. It's a strange story to our ears. It's about ten young women who are playing the waiting game around a special marriage. It was a cultural game that had them being prepared for a bridegroom to come, and they did not know when he would come. It could be for a day, could be a week or two weeks or more. It could be during the day, or in the dark of night. All the young women, something like our bridal party today, all they knew was where they had stay on the lookout, and that they had to have some means of light in the darkness.

In those days, long before batteries and flashlights, long before hurricane lamps with kerosene in them was a small little clay vessel and a wick in it and some olive oil. These would only hold a small amount of oil, and then they would need to be refilled. So you had to have your lamp and your clay pot with an oil supply ready to recharge the little clay lamp.

All ten of these young women knew how to play the game of waiting for the bridegroom. They all knew what they had to do. We don't have all the reasons why five were prepared with oil and five were not. Maybe some of

them procrastinated with buying oil. Maybe some of them thought they would have lots of time to buy it, and left it too late. But the wise ones were prepared and the foolish ones were not.

Jesus tells his audience who knew this game and understood it that you need to learn from those who put off their spiritual lives until later. They put off or procrastinate about their spiritual life until they have more time or more desire for spiritual things. Jesus says, "Don't put it off." Now is the time of salvation. Now is the time to cry out to God for help, even if you don't understand all the reasons why you need help. If you have one reason, cry out now. Later you might not have time. Later you might not have the ability. There is a window for buying oil. Oil often in the Scripture is a picture of the work of the Holy Spirit.

When God softens your heart toward Jesus, don't harden yourself, don't talk yourself out of your spiritual life with Jesus. Choose to say 'yes' now. Choose to say 'yes' to what God wants to do with your time, whether you have a lot or a little. Choose to agree with God.

These are simple words. But there is great conflict, even a battle within often to merely utter "yes" to God, "yes" to Jesus. As we remember all that has been done for us. This is the time to choose to serve God. This is the time for gratitude, wonder and amazement at this life, let alone going home to the next. In gratitude,

Let us pray.