

November 13, 2022 - The Opportunity to Testify Based on Luke 21:5-19 and Isaiah 65:17-25

The weather was cool but not cold. The wind not too brisk. Still, you needed your warm coat, hat, and gloves.

That was Friday, November 11 at the Peachland Cenotaph, when a goodly crowd, (perhaps several hundred) gathered for the traditional Remembrance Day Service. While the service was what one could say “routine,” it was at the same time unique. It was unique because everyone who attended, whether they spoke, laid a wreath, or just watched, had an opportunity to testify. They testified in their own way.

Veterans testified in silent prayer remembering lost friends, parents, or grandparents. I imagine in their remembering they were thinking about the senselessness of war and the tragic and unnecessary loss. Jean Saul, the Vice President of the local legion reminded us of the fallen Peachlanders from both World Wars. Mayor Elect Van Minsel read Flanders Fields and shared a brief reflection of his Holland roots tied to family and WW II.

I have no idea what those that laid wreaths or poppies were thinking, but I imagine it ranged from sadness and regret to being thankful. What were those young brownies and sparks thinking about when they laid their hand made remembrances, paper with cut out and coloured poppies? Did they understand the significance of the day? Were they just excited to be in some kind of a parade, or did they comprehend that they too, like all the adults there, were making testimony.

Everyone gathered was testifying in their own individual and unique way, that war fought on any level, at any place in the world is not the answer. They were also providing testimony for the need to reconcile conflict in ways that are conciliatory, not confrontational.

Being at a Remembrance Day service is a “gospel” act. You will have the opportunity to testify Jesus says, and then he adds ¹⁵ ***for I will give you words^[c] and a wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to withstand or contradict.***

Jesus gives us the wisdom to know that remembering conflict through testimony is important. And one doesn't have to speak out to have an impact, we just have to show up. We did that Friday and we do that in other ways too.

Jesus foretold of the Temple's destruction. It came to pass 40 years after his death. He predicted that ***“not one stone will be left upon another, all would be thrown down.”*** And he predicted that there would be sacrifices. He predicted many would be betrayed, brought before the governor, imprisoned, or executed. He predicted his name would be reviled. All that came to pass, but not everyone forgot.

Not everyone forgot. Many in fact chose to remember. Their remembering outlasted the empire, and it has outlasted empires since. That was testimony to Jesus' life and his ministry. It was testimony to the truth that kindness, generosity, and forgiveness are superior to evil. It was truth that despite the ugliness of conflict, God will win the day.

I wonder if our remembering can help do that? Can we continue to testify in the face of what seems to be heightening chaos?

Russia seems determined to take back some of what it claims are its rightful historical lands, even threatening to use nuclear arms if needed. But we are hearing and witnessing somewhat of a turn about. In addition to military aid and sanctions, is it possible that the testimony of non-Ukrainian people throughout the world, who send aid and pray are in some way brightening the landscape of this dreadful situation?

Our neighbours to the south seem to be losing grip on what democracy really means. Ego, partisanship, prejudice, bigotry and patriarchy are leading the decision-making process. We

gaze at our television screens aghast at the nonsense coming from the past US president. We are even more dumbfounded that so many millions of Americans seem to have become so self-centered. Republicans talk of taking their country back, which truthfully means they want to know “what is in it for me?” A nation known historically for its peace brokering and peace support efforts seems bent on a complete reversal. One Republican candidate said the other day, (my paraphrase) “If we win the house there will not be another dollar spent on assisting the Ukraine. We need to help America first.”

More troubling is that there seems to be an uptake of this attitude in our country. “Send the Chinese back home, they brought the Covid Virus. All Islamic people are terrorists. We don’t want any more refugees here.”

What testimony can we give to counter this wave of misguided, misinformed intolerance?

The text from Luke this morning is full of things that could make us doubtful, even hopeless. Nations will rise against nations. There will be great earthquakes, famines, plagues and “dreadful portents and great signs from heaven.”

We know this is happening today. What is going to become of our temple? As disciples of the word and ministers together, is it possible that our testimony in some way supports a rebuilding of harmony, a willingness to get along, an opportunity for reconciliation?

Yesterday afternoon at the Community Centre there was irrefutable evidence that this is not only possible, it happens!

Among 19 participants at what is called a “Blanket Exercise” facilitator Barbara Jagodics passionately led us through a time of reflecting on indigenous history in Canada, from the onset of colonization until our present time. She recited excerpts of what can rightfully be described as criminal behaviour on behalf of our earliest European Settlers and our Governments. Defrauding our first peoples of their rightful lands, stripping them of their culture and language, banning their religious practices, isolating them on small land allotments called reserves, forcing their children to attend residential schools resulting in physical, emotional and sexual abuse. She shared alarming data on youth and adult suicide rates, incarceration statistics, missing and murdered indigenous children and girls and homeless figures. **In all that Barb never shared a hostile or confrontational word.**

All who attended were moved, some to tears. Some asked, how is it you can do this? It must be difficult for you.

She replied that it is always difficult, but she does it because it is her way of acting for justice and speaking for true understanding between indigenous and others. She believes this to be vital.

What she was saying was she gives testimony about brokenness and offers opportunity for healing when she speaks. We heard her incredible story telling, and perhaps more importantly, those that were there will take that learning and share it. That will become their testimony. Perhaps in that way true understanding may one day be realized, and the temple of reconciliation can be rebuilt.

Perhaps, when we take the opportunity to testify, whether attending a Remembrance Day Service, voting, signing a petition, writing a letter to the editor, voicing objection to a racial slur or an insensitive remark, attending an indigenous event, or sharing our stories and learnings, we might do the same. We might move forward to rebuild a foundation for harmony in our time. That would be Jesus’ way.

Amen, and thank you for listening this morning.