

November 10, 2019    Holy Duties    Titus 2:11-3:2

I have several rituals around November 11<sup>th</sup> as Remembrance Day. Usually I come to Stirling and attend the ceremonies at our local War Memorial west of the church. But it starts shortly after Halloween. I begin watching for the local members of the Legion in Belleville to set up their table in the Mall Food Court. Their primary task is to sell poppies, in anticipation of the 11<sup>th</sup>. A couple of years back I noticed they had some very attractive pins. The pins always include a poppy but this year my contribution to the Poppy Fund included the obtaining of a pin with 1944 in large numbers and in small print...Juno Beach. I also chose a pin which states Afghanistan 2001-2014. The card on which the pin was mounted tells the numbers. 40,000 Canadians served in that campaign. Over 3000 were wounded. 157 died in the service of this nation. I remember their bodies being flown into Trenton. I remember that the relatively peaceful existence we almost take for granted as Canadians was bought with human currency. There are wars and rumours of war, as we await and anticipate the return of our Lord Jesus.

In Paul's letter to Titus, a young man who was converted to Christ out of the great pagan wash of those times, (Titus was a Gentile who helped Paul in his work)...in that letter Paul puts the present in its proper context, something we are tempted to forget. On a day like today it is worthy of our refreshing our memories. "For the grace of God which brings

salvation has appeared to mankind.” In a short sentence Paul is referring to Jesus birth in Bethlehem, HIS ministry in Galilee and Jerusalem, HIS being crucified on Calvary, and HIS resurrection 3 days later on a Sunday morning, the first day of the week.

We are tempted to forget that our times, these times and the times since Jesus resurrection on the first day of the week are bracketed on the one end by everything Jesus did and was a part of in HIS first coming, and the promise of HIS second coming. As Paul said in his epistle to Titus, “Jesus first coming teaches us to say, ‘NO!’ to ungodliness, and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age....while we wait for the blessed hope...the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave HIMSELF for us to redeem us.” We are living in the between time: between Jesus first coming and HIS second coming.

And there are moments when the times present us with realities that are unbelievable. Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain, simply could not believe that Hitler would plunge the world for a second time into World Wide War. Chamberlain was not a stupid man. He just could not believe, that someone would willingly cause the death of so many in order to accomplish his evil aims. And are there not moments when we say things like, “what is this world coming to?” The daily news telling us of shootings, often drug related. Sometimes the simple product of outrage and anger and even a

desire to terminate one's own life. And there are wars and rumours of war. Awful crimes. The exposure of the fragile nature of existence, the fragile nature of peace, the fragile nature of ordered societies and nations. Such is the nature of the between times. And just like the apostle Paul and his young friend we are in some moments tempted to ask what we think is the big question. What are we to do?

Fortunately for us Paul as he writes this letter works out the answer. Fortunately for Titus, and because the document by the grace of God was not only preserved but copied and distributed, and shared and on a frosty day in November we can read it and hear its wise advice yet again, in the shadows that the between times cast about us. He calls on Titus to teach these things. He calls on the people who belong to Jesus to remember these things in the midst of anxious and terrible times. And these are anxious and terrible times. Never in the history of our land has life been as cheap as it is today. Never in Canada's history has the advantage of an ordered nation fundamentally at peace been so unappreciated, among some clearly forgotten, and a willingness to tear Canada into pieces for self-centered reasons.

Here is the counsel of the apostle Paul, inspired (I believe) by God's own, Jesus promised Holy Spirit. "Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities." Submission comes hard to the balance of the population of Canada in these days. In the days in which Paul was living many believers would

be put to death for simply believing in Jesus. No matter what our trials and pains, we face nothing like the brutality of the Roman Empire in the early days of the between times. We cherish children and life in general. We practice the gift of universal education that allows people to have opened to them the options that come of being able to read and write. We care for the sick and the disabled. Perfectly? I would never make that claim. But I would never ever want to live in a pay for it or you can't have it, society when it comes to health care. Ours is a primarily ordered society. I do not live trembling behind my doors, or waiting for the knock on the door which will lead to arrest, imprisonment and death.

The governments of Canada and Ontario are philosophically different from one another, but they are not setting out to produce a more brutal and brutish society. I participated in the choosing of those governments as did you, and whether your choice was the national choice, or the provincial choice, or the choice in this community and township, you and I were given a choice. And so we have arrived at this moment having been part of the making of the decision of who would govern. I remember a time when I heard both Prime Minister Diefenbaker, and in his turn Prime Minister Pearson saying after defeats at the polls, "the people have spoken, and the people are always right." Regardless of our preferences as believers in Jesus, we are called to subject ourselves to those in authority over us who have the responsibility of governing the nation. Paul calls us to be

obedient regardless of our social class. And we know that that worked out. In the end (and it is not over) the Roman Empire passed away. The influence of Jesus increased.

In that light Paul calls us to be “ready to do whatever is good, to slander no one, to be peaceable, considerate and to show true humility to all men.” It is an ethic worth remembering and worthy of our putting into practice. In fact it sounds to me like Paul is saying what Jesus said... “Love the Lord your God with all you hart, with all your strength and with all your mind. And then go on to love your neighbour as yourself.”

“Pursuing whatever is good” means putting self interest on a back burner. To slander no one, means to control one’s tongue so that words might not harm others, or bring harm on ourselves or the faith communities of which we are a part. To be peaceable, means to seek the peace, putting violence aside, avoiding it, and avoiding what will insight violence on the part of others. And in showing humility to all our fellows, means respecting the other person regardless of class, ethnic origin, or gender.

Remembrance Day is not about remembering wars. It is about remembering the terrible cost at which peace and freedom have been bought. What Paul makes clear is that as followers of Jesus we have holy duties to perform as members of communities, as citizens of a province and a nation. Thanks

be to God we have privileges and rights too. We need to invest in their preservation. Let us pray.

Lord Jesus, we give thanks for Canada, for Ontario, and the towns and cities in which we live. We pray for families and children, men and women who are our neighbours. We ask that you bless them and us as we interact with them. Lord we ask that you would watch over those who wear uniforms and stand post that we might sleep and live in peace. Grant that we might build peace and dignity in Canada and beyond her borders. Grant that we might serve our neighbours and our nation in the sharing of the kind of love Jesus called us to live. May your name be honoured by the way we live and interact. Bless those who lead us with wisdom and a hunger to serve the greater good. In Jesus name we pray. Receive the glory, the honour and the praise. Amen