

Church of St John the Evangelist, Elora
Twenty Second Sunday after Trinity with Act of Remembrance
Ephesians 1:15-23, Psalm 149 and John 15: 8-17
November 13, 2022
Canon Paul Walker

Clearly the numbers of people who have engaged with and responded to the poppy project again this year tells us some important things. Over 9,000 knitted and crocheted poppies made by some people we know, and many others we don't know, is a response to the power of a symbol that in our culture draws people together. These poppies appear now at 18 other locations throughout Elora and Fergus: from nursing homes, museums, retail shops, legions, lampposts and libraries. It just keeps appearing. It is a community effort beyond our doors.



When this symbol is placed pouring out of a church bell tower and spilling out into the ground, it uniquely combines all of the associations of war, sacrifice, death, lament, and prayer. It becomes a unique tribute to the war dead that people need to see it, spend a moment with it, and sometimes even touch it. It becomes something almost sacramental that

elicits a story, often a story about a loved one who served in a war. It points us to something greater than ourselves.

This is a season of remembrance. We remember all the saints, all the souls, and now all those who died in the horrors of the battlefield in the name of serving us.

To remember is not just to recall or to look back at a past event, but to remember in a way that allows the past to become a reality in the present.

“Do this in remembrance of me,” Jesus says at the passover meal. Those are the words we hear every time we share the sacrament of the bread and wine, his body and blood, in communion. It's known as the *anamnesis*. It is a key and important concept of not only looking back to the past, but allowing the past event, in this case of Christ's death, to become present in our context. It is embracing the promise of Emmanuel, “*I am with you.*”

The opposite is of course related to the word *amnesia* - to forget. We all suffer from amnesia when we lose our keys, or our wallet, or forget what we came into a room for. The easiest cure

for this short term memory lapse is to go back; to walk out of the room; to retrace our steps. The act of going back into the past, where we just were, allows us to recall what we were looking for in the first place. That act of retracing our steps, of walking out of the room to hopefully recall what we were looking for is so critical. It can be described as an act of *anamnesis* - of bringing the past into the present. And when it happens a light goes off, and you say, “Oh yes, *now I remember* what I was looking for.” And you are able to move forward with a freedom.

In some parts of our past, we don't *want* to go back because it triggers an event that is harmful or traumatic. Just being in that place makes the past become present and it is far too much to bear.

Today we remember the trauma and horror of the wars. In a public act we intentionally go back in time to bring that suffering and bloodshed into our present reality so that we may not only pay tribute to those who died, and honour them, but to also commit ourselves in every way, in every relationship, in every conversation to be peace makers, bridge builders and reconcilers.

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will inherit the earth,” Jesus said to the crowds in the beatitudes.

And in going back, we are re-membered. We have a photograph or we hold a poppy and we discover that we are connected to them, and they are connected to us, the past becomes the present and we are *all* put back together. We are healed; we are reconciled.

“I do not call you servants any longer... but I call you friends,” Jesus says. It is a powerful declaration of Almighty God relinquishing all power to become one of us, to enter into our existence, to make a dwelling with us, and to call us into the presence of his Father. It is merciful act of anamnesis, accompanied by a command to love one another.

We are the Dead. Short days ago
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
Loved and were loved, and now we lie,
In Flanders fields.

Take up our quarrel with the foe:
To you from failing hands we throw
The torch; be yours to hold it high.