

20141109RemembranceDaySermon : Readings in place of a sermon

Introduction: Narrator

I have not personally experienced a war. For me to stand up here in the pulpit and pontificate on how one should respond to war and conflict has a certain false ring to it. Therefore in place of a sermon I'm going to let others who have experienced war and humankind's inhumanity to others and have written about it, share their views and stories. Each passage will end with the words: *God, make me an instrument of your peace* because that is what Remembrance Day is all about – remembering those who died in conflict and vowing to stop further conflict wherever possible.

1. - from *In Times Like These*, a memoir by Nellie McClung

Narrator:

Today we try to remember. It is easy to forget; to remember takes some effort. Nellie McClung knew that. She was a writer who put her talent and wits to work to support oppressed people; she was a staunch Methodist whose faith informed everything she did and was, including her politics; she was a wife, mother and friend of many. In this excerpt from her memoirs, she writes as a mother whose son is going to war.

Reader:

In my diary I wrote that day, Dec. 4th, 1915: This morning we said good-bye to our dear son Jack, at the CNR station where snow lay fresh and white on the roofs and on the streets, white and soft, and pure as a young heart. When we came home, I felt strangely tired and old, though I am only forty-two. But I know that my youth has departed from me. It has gone with Jack, our beloved, our first born, the pride of our hearts. Strange fate, surely, for a boy who has never had a gun in his hands, whose ways are gentle, and full of peace; who loves people, pities their sorrows and would gladly help them to solve problems.

What have I done to you, in letting you go into this inferno of war? And how could I hold you back without breaking your heart?....

God, make me an instrument of your peace.

2. - from *Fugitive Pieces*, a novel by Anne Michaels

Narrator:

Fugitive Pieces, a novel by Anne Michaels, shows us 'the pieces' of lives broken by war, and the miracle of hope that can grow even out of devastation.

In the following 'piece' we hear the beginning of the horror of Jakob Beer, a young Jewish boy in Poland, who, from his hiding place, overhears what happens to the rest of his family, including his sister, Bella.

Reader:

My sister had long outgrown the hiding place. Bella was fifteen and even I admitted she was beautiful, with heavy brows and magnificent hair like black syrup, thick and luxurious, a muscle down her back. "A work of art", our mother said, brushing it for her while Bella sat in a chair. I was still small enough to vanish behind the wallpaper in the cupboard, cramming my head sideways between choking plaster and beams, eyelashes scraping.

Since those minutes inside the wall, I've imagined that the dead lose every sense except hearing.

The burst door. Wood ripped from hinges, cracking like ice under the shouts. Noises never heard before, torn from my father's mouth. Then silence. My mother had been sewing a button on my shirt. She kept her buttons in a chipped saucer. I heard the rim of the saucer in circles on the floor. I heard the spray of buttons, little white teeth.... I wanted to go to my parents, to touch them. But I couldn't, unless I stepped in their blood... I ran and fell, ran and fell... (and finally hid, digging myself into the ground,) planting myself like a turnip, and covering my face with leaves. Then I felt the worst shame of my life; I was pierced with hunger. And suddenly I realized, my throat aching without sound - Bella...

God, make me an instrument of your peace.

3. - "This Was My Brother", a poem by Mona Gould

Narrator:

Mona Gould, was still a child when her brother left to fight in the Second World War. In a poem, she remembered him....

Reader:

This was my brother
At Dieppe.
Quietly a hero
Who gave his life
Like a gift.
Withholding nothing.
His youth ... his love ...
His enjoyment of being alive ...
His future, like a book
With half the pages still uncut -

This was my brother
At Dieppe ...
The one who built me a doll house
When I was seven,
Complete to the last small picture frame,
Nothing forgotten.
He was awfully good at fixing things,
At stepping into the breach when he was needed.
That's what he did at Dieppe.

He was needed.

And even death must have been a little ashamed
At his eagerness.

God, make me an instrument of your peace.

4. - from *A Terrible Beauty: 2 Letters*

Narrator:

In October, 1917, a young Canadian soldier named Talbot Papineau wrote to his mother about his experience in the trenches and his love and concern for her and his family.

Reader:

October 29, 1917
Dearest Mother,
After all, I have been able to write to you again before going over. We have been fortunate so far and all things are cheerful. I have even shaved this morning in a little dirty water. I was delighted last night to get two letters from you, and a box of candy which I have actually carried with me and have enjoyed. It was a cold night and I slept only about one hour. Also a noisy night, I can assure you, and the earth full of vibrations.
I hope by the same mail you receive another letter from me to say all is successfully over. But of course it may be difficult or impossible to write for a few days, so don't worry.

There seems so little to say when if only I knew what was to happen I might want to say so much. These would be poor letters to have as last ones but you must know with what a world of love they are written. Always remember that I could not love thee so well, or you love me, did I not love honour more. You have given me courage and strength to go very happily and cheerfully into the good fight. Love to all and a big hug for thee, my dear brave little mother.

Talbot...

Narrator

Nov. 5, 1917

Mrs. L.J.Papineau.

Dear Madam:

In confirmation of my telegram to you of yesterday's date I regret exceedingly to inform you that an official report has been received to the effect that Capt. A/Major T.M.Papineau, M.C. PPCLI was killed in action on October 30, 1917

Yours truly,

J.M.Knowles, Lieutenant

God, make me an instrument of your peace.

5. - from *The Faithful Gardener*

Narrator:

Clarissa Estes, an internationally known poet, psychoanalyst, and author has written *The Faithful Gardener*, a book of interlocked tales of loss, survival, and fierce rebirth centred around her uncle, a war-ravaged Hungarian peasant farmer and refugee, and about the many other 'almost saints' who made her childhood so remarkable. In this passage, she reflects on the impact of war.

Reader –

For a long time our small house was filled with many people who had just come from war - and back from the dead. They carried hundreds of horrific images and losses that cannot be described in words alone...

What does it mean to live with a war and memories of war inside oneself? It means one lives in two worlds. One looking for hope, the other feeling hopeless. One looking for meaning, the other convinced that the only meaning in life is that there is no meaning in life.

In each of our people who had suffered so greatly, there were two struggling persons. One living the life of the new world, the other running, constantly running, from memories of hell that rose up and gave chase. Ghosts animated by themselves, roused by a click of a door frame, a cat screeching suddenly in the night... a sudden gust of wind causing a curtain to sweep a jar off a table in a shot to the floor... a sudden train whistle and the sound of the long trestle rumbling.

Mundane matters caused terror, tears or revulsion...

There were wars in uncle that made him remember, as he said, 'too much'. There were wars between the death of hope and the hope for death, the hope for life and a life of hope.

Sometimes the only cease-fire that held for any length of time had to be negotiated by a treaty forged with much schnapps and much vodka.

God, make me an instrument of your peace.

6. - 'My Ideals' from *The Diary of Anne Frank*

Narrator:

We have all heard of the young Anne Frank, whose diary distilled for us the tragic experience of the victims of war. Exposed to the most inhuman conditions and pain, she still refused to surrender her right to life and future, and she maintained her faith and her hope that good would overcome evil.

Reader:

It's really a wonder that I haven't dropped all my ideals, because they seem so absurd and impossible to carry out. Yet I keep them, because in spite of everything I still believe that people are really good at heart. I simply can't build my hopes on a foundation consisting of confusion, misery, and death.

I see the world gradually turned into a wilderness. I hear the ever approaching thunder, which will destroy us, too. I can feel the suffering of millions and yet, when I look up into the heavens, I think that it will all come right, that this cruelty too will end and that peace and tranquility will return again.

In the meantime, I must uphold my ideals, for perhaps the time will come when I shall be able to carry them out.

God, make me an instrument of your peace.

Narrator: These words were found on the wall of a cellar in Cologne, Germany, where Jews hid from the Nazis:

I believe,
I believe in the sun,
even when it is not shining.
I believe in love,
even when feeling it not.
I believe in God
even when God is silent.

A brief period of silence...

THE REMEMBERING

An older person says

They shall grow not old,
as we that are left grow old;
age shall not weary them,
nor the years condemn.

A younger person replies

At the going down of the sun
and in the morning,
we will remember them.

All affirm

We will remember them.

The names of those from Rondebosch who died during the World Wars are read out. We also remember those who died in other armed conflicts including those who died in the struggle for freedom in South Africa.

At beginning of the minute silence the Last Post is played.

Silence is kept.

At completion of the silence the Reveille is played.

Minister:

Ever-living God, we remember those whom you have gathered from the storm of war into the peace of your presence; may that same peace calm our fears, bring justice to all peoples and establish harmony among the nations, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.