

**Sermon for Zion, November 10, 2019 – Remembrance Sunday**

**Hymns:** 330 - O God Our Help; 800 - O Canada; 739 - Lord, Make Us Servants Of Your Peace; 733 – O God of Love, True Source of Peace

**Scripture:** Luke 9:18-24; 18:31-34

**Sermon Title:** The D-Day Sacrifice – 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

*Luke 9:18-24*

*When Jesus was alone praying, his disciples came to him, and he asked them, “What do people say about me?”*

*They answered, “Some say that you are John the Baptist or Elijah or a prophet from long ago who has come back to life.”*

*Jesus then asked them, “But who do you say I am?”*

*Peter answered, “You are the Messiah sent from God.”*

*Jesus strictly warned his disciples not to tell anyone about this.*

*Jesus told his disciples, “The nation’s leaders, the chief priests, and the teachers of the Law of Moses will make the Son of Man suffer terribly. They will reject him and kill him, but three days later he will rise to life.”*

*Then Jesus said to all the people: “If any of you want to be my followers, you must forget about yourself. You must take up your cross each day and follow me. If you want to save your life, you will destroy it. But if you give up your life for me, you will save it.*

*Luke 18:31-34*

*Jesus took the twelve apostles aside and said: “We are now on our way to Jerusalem. Everything that the prophets wrote about the Son of Man will happen there. He will be handed over to foreigners, who will make fun of him, mistreat him, and spit on him. They will beat him and kill him, but three days later he will rise to life.”*

*The apostles did not understand what Jesus was talking about. They could not understand, because the meaning of what he said was hidden from them.*

D-Day. June 6, 1944. Seventy-five years ago. Seventy-five years, five months, four days. Utah, Omaha, Gold, Juno, and Sword Beach; names given to a 50 mile stretch of the Normandy coast; names which would forever represent the beginning of the end of the Second World War, names which would represent for over three hundred and fifty thousand Allied soldiers the beginning of a living nightmare, names which would represent for over one hundred and fifty thousand troops and airmen a disabling wound, and for a further fifty thousand boys from Britain, the United States and Canada, the end of their lives. You can still visit over 5000 Canadian graves alone, there on the Normandy coast; there, at D-Days heart.

I can't believe it was as long ago as 1998 – and I can't believe 1998 was twenty-one years ago - that I went into a movie theatre to watch "Saving Private Ryan." The first twenty-seven minutes involve a harrowing, graphic account of the landing on Omaha Beach, which left me – and everyone in the theatre – shaking in our seats. The images and experience still filled my mind the following Sunday, when I greeted a then seventy-eight-year-old veteran of D-Day after church. "I saw Saving Private Ryan," I said to him. "What an experience. It made you feel like you were right there, on that beach."

Well, that was a mistake. He stood there, motionless, looking me in the eye, wondering how to respond to something so thoughtless. Finally, rather than just walking away, he decided to set me straight.

"You felt like you were there? I don't think you did, with your popcorn and your comfy seat. I don't think you have any idea what it was like to be there. To have any idea, you would have had to arrive at that movie theatre in a packed landing craft filled with the smell of fear and seawater and bile and diesel sloshing at your feet. You had to listen to the man beside you crying in panic, the man on the other side of you desperately praying, the man in front of you swearing, the man behind you throwing up. You had to hear the shells hitting the water around you and the screams of men in other landing craft hit and burning and sinking. You had to hear the shells cratering the beach and the machine guns strafing the water and the roaring and stink of the boat's engines. Then you had to see the ramp of your boat splash into the water and suddenly it is all there right in front of you and you're wading waist deep towards the nightmare on the beach and someone behind you is screaming for you to move but you're like molasses in that water and you're trying to hold your gun high and not slip and fall and be trampled by a thousand men behind you. You had to know you weren't ready for this, you had to know death or worse was waiting for you at any moment, and if not for you then for the guy beside you. Because most of all you're just waiting for that bullet you'll never hear from a gun you'll never see fired by a man you'll never meet on a beach you've never heard of but where you'll leave an arm or a leg or a friend or your life. Multiply that by a thousand, and maybe you'll feel like you were right there."

And I stood there stunned, knowing how right he was, as he tried to gather himself, as he tried to shake off the memory. And all I could think to say was, "How could you get on that boat, knowing what was coming?"

"You didn't know what was coming," he said. "You couldn't know, not really. Not till you were right there. You knew it would be bad, but you couldn't know how bad it was going to be, because you couldn't imagine anything like it. Impossible."

And he turned to walk away, shaking his head. But turning back, he said one more thing: “If you weren’t there, you couldn’t imagine it, you could never really know what it was like. And if you were there, you could never forget it. No matter how hard you try.”

And those of us who gather this Monday, this Remembrance Day, will gather to remember those who couldn’t imagine what awaited them, but who went anyway, knowing it would be bad, knowing they might be leaving behind - on some beach or field or mountain or desert or sea - an arm, a leg, a friend, their life. But they went anyway. For those they loved. For those they’d never meet. For us. For you. For me. That’s why we stand, on the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month of the year. That’s why we stand on Remembrance Day.

To know what’s coming, and to go anyway - to walk into the terrible unknown, for the sake of another – it is the very definition of sacrifice. And it is the essence of what Jesus did for us.

*Jesus took the twelve apostles aside and said: “We are now on our way to Jerusalem. Everything that the prophets wrote about the Son of Man will happen there... The nation’s leaders, the chief priests, and the teachers of the Law of Moses will make the Son of Man suffer terribly. They will reject him... He will be handed over to foreigners, who will mock him, mistreat him, and spit on him. They will beat him and kill him...”*

He knew what was coming. Jesus knew what was coming. His brothers warned him. His friends tried to change his mind. His own disciple betrayed him. Another denied him. His Temple’s soldiers arrested and beat him. His religion’s leaders convicted him. His occupying forces tortured him. His governor condemned him. His people demanded they crucify him. His mother watched him die. And he knew it was coming. And he went anyway. For those he loved. For those who loved him. For those who did not. For all of us, he went anyway. For all of us, he died. Not by accident; but by sacrifice. Freely given. For he knew what was coming.

But he knew this too: “...but three days later he will rise to life.”

I hope the boys on Juno Beach knew that too. I hope the boys on Utah, Omaha, Gold, Juno, and Sword Beach knew that too. I hope they knew that the Jesus who died, died for them; that as they risked life and limb for others, he gave life and limb for them. So that they could rise from their crashed planes, from their sunken ships, from their burned-out pillboxes, from their charred tanks, from the cold sea, from

their sandy graves; rise, and live again. I hope they knew that, and trusted that, and held that close, as close as God held each of them.

They answered their nation's call, these boys (Men, yes, they were men, but the older I get, the more I think of them as boys, especially since so many were no older, and so many younger, than my own son. Himself a man, yes, but always and ever my boy. And each man who died that day was somebody's boy). They answered their nation's call, and they gave themselves, many their all, in defeat of a terrible evil, to conquer a terrible wrong. They answered their nation's call, and so, this day, our nation - and others - are nations of hope, of justice, of peace.

And now you, too, are called. You too, are called to right terrible wrongs. You, too, are called to think of the needs of others before your own. You, too, are called to sacrifice of your time, your talents, your resources, to take a risk, to take a chance, to step out in faith, in love, in self-sacrifice:

*Then Jesus said to all the people: "If any of you want to be my followers, you must forget about yourself. You must take up your cross each day and follow me. If you want to save your life, you will destroy it. But if you give up your life for me, you will save it."*

To give up your life for Jesus is to give up your life for the poor, for the oppressed, for the hungry, for the frightened, for the incarcerated, for the addicted, for the misguided, for the desperate, for the sick, for the despairing, for the lonely, for the grieving, for the lost. To give up your life for Jesus is to reach out to those in need and offer them a piece of yourself – a piece of your time, a piece of your money, a piece of your heart – to reach out to those in need and in the name of Jesus to offer a hand of hope, to make a difference, to make a friend. To, each day, think less of yourself, and more of others. To follow Jesus.

He knew what was coming, and he went anyway. He gave up his life for you. Will you share your life with others for him? Will you bring them hope? Will you bring them life? Will you bring them to Jesus?

To know what's coming, and to go anyway – to walk into the terrible unknown, for the sake of another – it is the very definition of sacrifice. We honour those who did so, this Remembrance Day. We honour those who do so today. And each and every day, may we honour the one who gave his life for us all: And follow him. Amen.