

## Address

Outside the Church in the Garden of Remembrance the names of the 210 servicemen from Kinross-shire who died in the First World War are marked. It is a sobering thought that there are almost exactly that number of seats downstairs in the Church. Three perspex silhouettes sitting among us this morning and seated on benches around the town remind us of those who did not return to their home and family.

As I speak this morning, 100 candles will be lit around the church in memory of them and in recognition of the century that has passed since the guns finally fell silent on this day in 1918 at the end of more than 4 years of terrible bloodshed. If you are sitting by one of the trays of candles, please help by lighting the candles when the tapers come to you. Do also please continue to drape the tied red cords of wool right round the church as a symbol of our unity here today and our connexion with those who served all those years ago.

We have read a very simple story from Mark's Gospel this morning. Jesus teaches His disciples that what we give cannot simply be measured in terms of big numbers. A wealthy person may not even miss a donation to a good cause of hundreds or even thousands of pounds but it looks impressive to the casual onlooker. Who could fail to be wowed by a sum on a cheque that has lots of zeros on the end? Compare it with the sacrificial gift which may not amount to very much money but which actually represents a greater level of generosity than the big cheque.

A couple of years ago I had the privilege of visiting some of the First World War battlefields on the Western Front. One beautiful sunny day we visited Tyne Cot Cemetery and struggled to take in the immensity of the loss that was represented even by that one cemetery. There are almost 12,000 graves there but there is also a wall where the names of a further 35,000 are recorded whose bodies were never recovered. It was only when I read the inscription on one grave that the reality struck. It recorded the death of a 20 year old Australian soldier, his parents' only child. From the other side of the world he came and, to paraphrase the words from our Bible reading this morning, 'He gave all he had.'

We can argue all we like about the rights and wrongs of War and about the rights and wrongs of particular courses of action taken before, during and after the First World War and indeed also subsequent conflicts, but what cannot be disputed is that those whom we remember and commemorate today, who gave their lives for the peace and freedom that we now enjoy,

gave all they had; they paid the ultimate price and made the ultimate sacrifice.

The rows and rows of graves in Flanders Field and in so many other places; the lists of names on monuments from the Menin Gate to Gallipoli and in every community from Unst to Whithorn remind us of the obscene cost of War but the numbers with all the zeroes on the end are eclipsed by the price that was paid by each individual – they gave all they had. It was everything.

It is beyond important that we continue not only our annual Act of Remembrance but a commitment to deepen our understanding of the lessons that history has to teach us. They said that the First World War was the war to end all wars and yet within a generation the world was embroiled in a still more terrible conflict – unbelievably there were four times as many dead by 1945 as there had been by 1918. Far from being an end to war the conclusion of the First World War, the Armistice whose centenary we celebrate today, turned out to be the catalyst for the Second.

So are we condemned to revisit and repeat the mistakes of the past? Not if we keep our eyes on each one who gave all they had. And not if we keep our eyes on the One whose perfect sacrifice on the Cross for the sins of the whole world, for yours and mine. He gave everything He had, once and for all, and in so doing won the gift of perfect peace in the heart of each one who will receive Him.

Arthur Gossip, a chaplain serving with troops during the First World War, wrote these words about his wartime experience: “Never have I found it so easy to preach as at the front: never have I known men so ready to listen. It was always the deep things that they wanted, not knowing what a day or an hour might bring forth. What shall I preach about? I used to ask. ‘Tell us something about Jesus Christ’.”

The message of Christ the Prince of Peace and the Saviour of the World has the same power to touch and to change lives today and provides another link between us here today and those we commemorate from the past. But it offers to us the challenge of how we will respond. How will we let what we are doing here just now and at the War Memorial a little later change the way we live? 'This is how we know what love is, says the apostle John. Jesus Christ laid down His life for us.' He gave all that He had. Jesus Himself said, 'Greater love has no-one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.' The 210 from Kinross-shire who are commemorated in the Garden and the 772,000 from all across the country who gave their lives a century ago gave all that they had.

What about us? We have freedom – it is for sharing. We have peace – it is for living. We have life – it is for giving. Will we share only what we have to share of our riches after we have looked after number one? Or will we in our time also commit ourselves to give all that we have?