

Remembrance Day Message

“Take Up Our Quarrel”

In Dr. John McCrae’s poem *“In Flanders Fields,”* the fallen cry out to those they leave behind:

“Take up our quarrel with the foe:

To you from failing hands we throw the torch; be yours to hold it high.”

These words took on flesh in recent events in our Nation’s capital and Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu, a sleepy suburb of Montreal. Two Canadian soldiers are dead following two separate quarrels they were unwittingly drawn into.

Thursday October 20th 2014, Warrant Officer Patrice Vincent, 53, was killed. He was fatally struck by a car in a hit and run incident in a mall parking lot. The alleged perpetrator Martin Rouleau, a 25-year-old, “radicalized,” Quebec man, was shot and killed by police following a high speed car chase.

On October 22, 2014, Michael Zehaf-Bibeau fatally shot Corporal Nathan Cirillo, a Canadian soldier on ceremonial guard duty at the Canadian National War Memorial in downtown Ottawa, Ontario. He then launched an attack in the nearby Centre Block Parliament Building, where members of the Parliament of Canada were attending caucuses. Zehaf-Bibeau was killed inside the Block in a gunfight with parliament security personnel. Parliamentary Sergeant-at-Arms Kevin Vikers, a 29 year veteran of the RCMP, was credited with fatally shooting and killing Zehaf-Bibeau.

Both Patrice Vincent and Michael Cirillo had heard the call of their fallen comrades, had taken the torch from them and were holding it high. Both had joined the Armed Forces, one to active service, and the other as a reservist. Both were attacked on native soil because they proudly wore the uniform of the Canadian Soldier and had made an oath to serve and protect their home and native land. In response to the senseless attacks, other Canadian heroes, who had also picked up that torch and taken an oath, stepped in. Quebec’s finest, Parliamentary security forces and Parliament’s Sergeant-at-Arms sprang into action to quell the attacks.

Corporal Cirillo was killed while guarding a monument dedicated to the comrades in arms from whom he had taken the torch. The crime scene for Corporal Cirillo’s death points us to Remembrance Day. On November 11th, our Nation will give thanks for those who gave their utmost and their highest defending our nation from World War I through this very day. We will remember them!

In the poem, *“In Flanders Fields,”* the torch described was not just passed on to members of the Canadian Armed Forces, that torch was passed on to all Canadians. We are all called to hold that torch high and shed light. Our fallen defenders call us to continue to fight foes. They call us to lives that are worthy of their sacrifice.

The fallen call us to fight the foe of selfishness. Those who fought to defend our nation, sacrificed their freedom and gave their lives for us to have freedom. They ask us to be beacons of light by putting the needs of our nation and the most vulnerable in our society ahead of our own needs. The greatness of a nation is measured not only by its soaring gross national product, its technological innovations and high standard of living, but also for its capacity to care for the least of its citizens, the poor, the sick, and the vulnerable. Canadians have made excellent progress in all of these areas, however, we can accomplish more, as more of our citizenship engages in sacrificial living and giving.

Our fallen comrades call us to examine our lives in light of the opportunities they fought to give us. They ask us to look at how we spend our time and our resources. They ask each of us this

question: “What are you giving back to the society that nurtures and sustains you?” There are many charities that help at home and abroad. They ask us whether we are caring, volunteering, and donating. They ask us whether there are foes in our lives that keep us trapped and keep us from living freely. They plead with those trapped by addictions and debilitating medical conditions to get help, to break those chains and live a free and productive life.

The fallen call us to fight the foe of apathy in our land. They call those with the necessary gifts and skills to serve in the public sector and run for public office. They call all Canadians of voting age to be engaged, to understand the issues facing our nation, to know the candidates and their platforms and to cast our ballots with integrity.

In the poem, *‘In Flanders Fields,’* I hear the fallen call Canadian Christians to lift high our torch. Their sacrifice points us the sacrifice that Jesus made on the cross for us. He fought a battle on the cross against our greatest foes, sin, death and the Devil. By his innocent suffering and death on the cross and his glorious resurrection he opens the gate to eternal life to all who believe in him.

The Apostle Paul calls all Christians to pray for those in authority. *“I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people—for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Savior.”* (1 Timothy 2:1-3). We should therefore regularly pray for Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, our Governor General David Johnston, our Prime Minister Stephen Harper, the Parliament, our Premiers and their legislatures, and all others in federal, provincial and local government, who have authority over us. We must ask God to give them the wisdom and compassion necessary to govern us in a manner that is pleasing to God.

Paul calls Christians to obey those in authority over us, as civil authorities are instituted by God. God has given government the authority to keep the peace and judge and punish the wrongdoer. (Romans 13:1-4). Disobedience of those in authority is only appropriate when government requires a Christian to commit an act which contravenes God’s Word. Thus Paul would call all Christians to pray for those whom God uses to keep us safe: our military, our police forces, our judges, our criminal justice system, those who work in our correctional system, all firefighters, paramedics, doctors, nurses and all who work in our medical system. We must pray that God stand guard over them, and guide and direct them as they stand on guard over us and serve us every day.

Jesus called his disciples to love: *“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.”* (Matthew 5:44) *But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back.* (Luke 6:35). Jesus calls Christians to lift up warrant officer Patrice Vincent and Corporal Michael Cirillo to God, and pray for and comfort their families. Our nation has reached out to their families, mourned their loss and celebrated the lives of their deceased. Our nation will provide for their physical needs. The Church must reach out to them for their spiritual needs.

Christians are also called to remember the loss suffered by the families of Martin Rouleau and Michael Zehaf-Bibeau, the perpetrators in these senseless acts. I cannot imagine the grief their families are enduring. Their loved ones’ names will hereafter be linked to a very dark hour in this nation’s history. Each man will be remembered as a bringer of darkness, not a bearer of light. They will no doubt wonder whether we will blame them for these dark events. They may fear reprisals. They may wonder whether their lives will ever get back to normal again. We Christians are called to pray for them, mourn with them, and reach out to them with the Gospel.

Christians are called to pray for those in our land who would hurt us. Our prayer should be that God would intervene in their lives and turn their hatred for this land into love. God calls us to intervene, to reach out to them with the Gospel message.

This all seems impossible. Yet, Jesus reminds what is impossible for us, is possible for God. Look at what has happened since World War II. Look how bitter enemies have become steadfast friends and treasured allies. God calls Christians to keep the faith and keep on praying and proclaiming.

On Sunday, November 9th, we will be hosting a special Remembrance Day Worship service for Veterans and those who defend us at home and abroad. The service is at 10:30 AM and a lunch will follow. Everyone is invited and welcome to join us and pay your respects along with us at Grace Lutheran Church at 1162 Hudson Road, West Kelowna.

In Christ's service.

Pastor Ed Skutshek