

North Kildonan United Church

13th November 2022 ~Rev. Don Johnson

Isaiah 65: 17-25

Luke 21: 5-19

Gracious God, open our hearts and minds by the power of your Holy Spirit, that we may hear your Word with joy. Amen.

The stories of the life and wisdom and wit of Winston Churchill are legendary. He is particularly remembered for his strong and passionate leadership during the Second World War, for his ability to stir the hearts and minds and wills of his listeners, and for his unflinching vision of ultimate victory and the end of Nazi tyranny. It is fitting that in Westminster Abbey, near the grave of the unknown warrior, embedded in the floor is a large marble tablet engraved with the words "Remember Winston Churchill". The full text reads:

REMEMBER WINSTON CHURCHILL
IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE WISHES OF
THE QUEEN AND PARLIAMENT
THE DEAN & CHAPTER PLACED THIS STONE
ON THE TWENTY FIFTH ANNIVERSARY OF
THE BATTLE OF BRITAIN
15 SEPTEMBER 1965

This tablet is basically the last memorial a person reads as they leave the Abbey, a final reminder of the significance of the man who, as President John F. Kennedy said: "*...mobilized the English language and sent it into battle.*" (The president was quoting Edward R. Murrow of CBS News).

So in Westminster Abbey earlier today, hundreds gathered to observe Remembrance Sunday, and as the clergy and choir assembled around the grave of the Unknown Warrior and observed two minutes of silence, solemnly remembering the sacrifice of so many in time of war; as they prayed and sang and carried out the rituals of remembrance, just a few feet away is the silent tribute in green marble to the man whose leadership and vision brought the world an end of one dictatorship and the hope of a new beginning.

So, we remember Winston Churchill, at least most of us do, with gratitude and acceptance of his shortcomings, since none of us is perfect and sometimes decisions must be made quickly that perhaps turn out to be less than ideal when reviewed by the luxury of time. Others however, in their never-ending quest to condemn anyone and any action or deed that does not measure up to their standards of how things should have been, these people ignore his achievements and demonize his actions, oblivious to the danger civilization faced if the Second World War had ended with the defeat of the Allies.

On this Sunday after Remembrance Day, we continue to call to mind the sacrifices made on our behalf, reaffirming our commitment to be peacemakers and peacekeepers, to live out these goals in our relationships, our homes and communities, and to continue to support organizations and institutions existing to enhance the well-being of others.

Let's go back to Mr. Churchill for a moment. He was a very talented man, especially with his command of the English language, which was recognized in 1953 with the awarding of the Nobel Prize in Literature. That prize was awarded partly because of his various histories he wrote but also because of his use of language in his speeches.

Sir Winston was also a talented painter and he thought he was a skilled bricklayer. The story is told of a time before the Second World War when he was building a brick wall in his garden at Chartwell. Apparently, it was an awful mess, bricks improperly laid, too much mortar here, not enough there, nothing really plum, though he proudly showed his handiwork to his groundskeeper and his private detective, seemingly oblivious to his mistakes. Churchill happily stopped for lunch and disappeared inside. The groundskeeper and the detective looked at each other and they proceeded to quickly dismantle all the ill placed bricks and relayed them to create a proper, level, presentable garden brick wall. It seems that Churchill never noticed the corrected wall, or perhaps he just never admitted that it was someone else's work.

November in church life is a month of remembrance. I've taken to using the four *Sundays before Advent* designation as a way of acknowledging that the services and the lessons are basically reminding us that we are moving into a new time, a new season, a new church year. That's why today is called the Second Sunday before Advent.

Let me explain. After the Day of Pentecost, each Sunday is known as a Sunday after Pentecost, or also known as Ordinary Time, because that's exactly what it is. So today is also called the 23rd Sunday after Pentecost.

But these last four Sundays before a new church year have a different feel to them. First of all, there seems to be a theme of remembrance in these four Sundays. The fourth Sunday is usually All Saints, when we remember those of our congregation and of our life who have passed from this life to eternal life. The third Sunday is Remembrance Sunday, as we call to mind the sacrifice and loss through war and recommit ourselves to the work of peacemaking. Today, the second Sunday, draws us closer to the conclusion of the church year and the first Sunday, next week, is the Reign of Christ Sunday, which is the final Sunday of the church year. No real place for Grey Cup Sunday in that calendar!

The lessons, such as today's readings, speak of endings and new beginnings in a way the readings in other months do not. Our Gospel reading is not a parable or two about lost coins or lost sheep or repentant, returning children to a loving parent.

Instead, today's reading is about the destruction of the Temple, about wars and rumours of wars, warnings about persecution and betrayal, division within the family

because of conflicting faith professions. "You will all be hated" Jesus says.

The Gospel feels like we are being prepared for an ending and a new beginning. We are offered words that are meant to strengthen the disciples of Jesus for the possible hard times ahead. History tells us that many times the followers of Jesus will know persecution and worse, and that mistreatment of Christians is still to be found in parts of the world to this day. But regardless of what happens, Jesus urges them, urges us, to hang on, to continue to be faithful followers, to endure, trusting that the best is yet to come.

We find that promise in the Isaiah reading as well. The promise of a new heaven and a new earth, of a new way of being, of living in harmony with one another and with the whole creation. The promise of long and happy life, of mutual respect and shared prosperity. The promise of enemies living now as friends, of predators and the prey eating together, existing together in joy and community.

What words of hope and promise these are, especially for people whose daily living is harmed by greed and hatred and fear. Think of the promise. Yes, today may not good but in God's good time life will be all we can hope for and more. And these words are more than promise, though promise is important. They are directions for life, here and now.

The challenge always before people of faith is how do we play our part in bringing about a healing of the earth, a lessening of fear and danger, an easing of burdens for others. How do we, as disciples of Jesus, live out our calling as peacemakers and peacekeepers? How do we catch the vision of new life, new promise, not just for some, but for all?

As Carl Daw writes in his hymn **O Day of Peace.**

*O day of peace that dimly shines
through all our hopes and prayers and dreams,
guide us to justice, truth, and love,
delivered from our selfish schemes.*

*May swords of hate fall from our hands,
Our hearts from envy find release,
Till by God's grace our warring world
Shall see Christ's promised reign of peace.*

*Then shall the wolf dwell with the lamb,
nor shall the fierce devour the small,
as beasts and cattle calmly graze,
a little child shall lead them all.*

*Then enemies shall learn to love,
all creatures find their true accord,
the hope of peace shall be fulfilled,
for all the earth shall know the Lord.*

Amen, may it be so.