

SERMON: **“Waiting.”**

Rev. Geoff Ross Sun., Nov. 5, 2017, St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Brampton

I know what you're thinking: that was a rather strange reading for Remembrance Day Sunday? And I agree with you: a reading about bridesmaids of the wise and foolish variety for Remembrance Day Sunday? But this passage is not about weary/foolish women: this is a parable about watchfulness/being prepared/ready to be counted when the Lord comes. It is also a parable of what happens in life – and faith – as we live out those mundane moments that make up a dull day. Which, if we are to truly remember those who sacrificed the days/months/years of their lives – and those who never returned home – we must also remember that often the most dangerous enemy they faced was the dulling/decaying/dreariness of waiting.

The misconception about war is that it's all action all the time. Warfare – for the most part – is nothing like the movies, filled with explosions/gun fire/heroic action; it is long periods of boredom punctuated by moments of sheer terror. There are hours/days – and in the case for most Canadians during WWII – years, where nothing happens/ed. In army parlance, the life of a soldier/airman/sailor could best be described as, 'hurry up and wait:' with the emphasis on waiting. And it was no different at home where millions of women/families waited/pined/longed for/anticipated the return of their loved-one/sons/husbands/fathers. War is terrifying but it is also monotonous; and it's in the waiting that life – and often our faith – gets played out.

[Trent:CDN History/WWII – GDJ Diaries: Numbing waiting/distraction.]

In his book **In This Sign**, a history of the Canadian Chaplain Services during WWII, Walter Steven quotes the Canadian Militaries Principal Chaplain in London (1940) on the dangers of waiting, ***“it now looks as if Canadians [will] spend another winter in England and the menace of boredom is looming up.”*** Little did he know that it would be three more years of useless/meaningless waiting during which the ***“chief enemies encountered were boredom, homesickness and disappointment.”*** A former Chaplain, the author adds that ***“in certain less stable personalities these found their natural expression in absence with leave”*** and other offenses. (p. 34) Elsewhere we're told ***“there were, of course, more sinister things affecting the morals and morale of the soldier:”*** meaning ***“the general loose attitude to the free use of intoxicants and the constant menace”*** of ***“fraternization.”*** And the distance between the home front the battle front did as much damage by causing doubt/distrust in the hearts and minds of those worn weary by waiting. [Pointlessness/waiting/purpose]

Now I am not trying to diminish the horrors of warfare. Every year we are reminded that war isn't pretty/doesn't make sense/costs too much: we're reminded

of the sacrifice/waste of lives/resources over what; ideology/land/power? War is not glorious/nor noble – that it is the result of the worst not the best of us. I mention the deleterious effects of waiting because, in many ways, it was/is the real enemy – it was/is the doubt that wears down the defences/erodes what was once solid/makes life seem meaningless. In his book **The Padre**, Barry Rowland, transcribing his father's wartime letters, quotes his description of the dreary ***“daily routine of war.”*** In one letter dated August 4, 1943 he writes that ***“this war must end soon or else.... There's a lot of monkey business going on.”*** Distance/waiting didn't make the heart grow fonder, for many it caused it to wander.

[Waiting: Idle hands/Devil's workshop: *“don't stand something/fall for anything.”* AHamilton]

In **In This Sign** my Grandfather is quoted to say that faith was the foundation of morale. By this he meant a faith that not only didn't show fear/shrink from the ordeal of battle, but that also withstood the distractions of waiting. He observed: ***“that in every emergency of life the man whose faith is most solidly based, and whose Christian experience is most abounding, will be most ready to take [what comes.]”*** In other words, faith not only enables us to endure the waiting, it gives us the reason for waiting. And this, at its core, is what the reading tells us: as people of faith, we are to remain faithful/true to – to wait faithfully for – God; but that's not all: we are to be vigilant/alert/awake, waiting for dawn/our bridegroom/Lord who will usher in the promised celebration in of heaven.

Friends, the parable was true for those hearing Jesus tell it, just as it was for those who heard it in times of war, and is true from us hearing it today: it is a call for us to be vigilant/to be watchful and it is a warning for us to be prepared against the crisis of faith experienced by those waiting for the kingdom to come. Tellingly, the issue isn't when the bridegroom/kingdom will come – God/Jesus will come; it's how we spend our time while we wait. As we take the time this week to remember those who served – who gave of themselves/their lives/those who returned – let us not forget what they did for us. And, in our remembrance, let us also be vigilant – let us stand and wait, but as we wait, let us look forward to God's promised future with hope/faith. Amen.