

SERMON: "No Greater Love: A List of Names."

Rev. Geoff Ross: Sunday, November 8, 2020, St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church

["What a list!"/preach about lists?Nobody knows who they were!lived/died long ago! Prisca/Aquila,Mary/Rufus, Andronicus/Junia-Herodion/Narcissus:Not just a list – but a list of names!

Every Church I've been in has a list of names – maybe two. Names listed, alphabetically, on brass plaques/granite monuments – names of those who died for Canada/freedom/us during the Two World Wars – names that many of my generation/most of the next, don't know. But, for those who were in the war/lost someone/lived through it, they are more than just a list of names. For us at St. Andrew's, these names were former members of this congregation; those who made up/served/attended this Church/sat in these pews.Each name had a person behind it, a story - some personal connection to each of you/us. That's why, on Remembrance Day, we read the list of their names out – to remember them.

[Paul/Romans:Letter- 'greet's'/thanks 24 people/friends-known/worked with/cared for by Paul/knew 12 well: Prisca/Aquila/Junia/Apelles/Persis – Rufus and his mother.7 women/5 men:Greek/Roman/Jewish, rich/slaves/freedmen/craftsmen/ordinary people singled out for their extraordinary service/sacrifice.]

Paul gives thanks to his sisters/brothers in Christ for their faith, despite the threat of persecution/death – and for their sacrificial love as *"they risked their necks for him."* These were people who Paul knew/had relationships with/prayed with/feared for/loved/missed. They were his sisters/brothers/mother – not just a list of names. They were "family," not by blood, but by love. What makes this list special is that it's made up of names/people who had faith/love enough to give/commit their lives out of love for love others. This is really a list of names and love – and this is what binds our two readings together.

[Geoffrey:"God's-Peace"- French/German/Old English root:currently 990/1000 on Baby names.com! 3 Geoffrey's:Grandfather-GDJ(Poppa)/Uncle-GDJ(Geoffy)/Me(Thumper)-Last Geoff standing:all PM's!. Grandfather died 42 yrs/ago-16. Remember him("Bear"/bushy eyebrows/leading RD services/cenotaph/Brantford-Hon.Col.Regiment – in Awe!]

Walter Steven's, in his book, **In This Sign**, details both the mundane/heroic work done by Canadian Chaplains during WWII. In several places he quotes my Grandfather's reflections about the hardest task assigned to a chaplain; that of counting the casualties/dead/preparing the list of names for processing. In one passage, he recounted that the hardest part of a chaplains' role was to provide *"a Christian farewell to our men and to write a personal word of strength and comfort to the proud but sorrowing loved ones."* (In This Sign, p. 93) Over/over again, the administering of the rite of burial/writing to the unsuspecting, but soon grieving, family about the loss of their son/brother/husband/father were described by my Grandfather as the heaviest duties, but they were also acts of respect/love/remembrance.

[Pictures:Cemeteries-white crosses/raw earth/fresh graves. Bodies identified/Names recorded/Families to notify – telegrams/“Muriel’s Story.”.]

Each year we gather to remember – we say/hear their names/tell their stories. Those who served – regardless of when – were our fathers/husbands/brothers/sons/boyfriends-mothers/wives/sisters/classmates. Each answered their generation’s call to respond/to love one another – to lay it down/sacrifice for others if they had to. By remembering/by reading out their names/by living out the acknowledging that our lives were won at a terrible cost – we are consciously deciding that their death was not in vain/will not be forgotten. And this is what Remembrance/rememembering means:It’s an active response to love; it is a call to love one another!

In His final conversations with His disciples, Jesus, (John reading), explains the importance/power of love/our need to live/die by it – that love is only complete when it’s given/exchanged/offered freely/wholly just like He/God did/does/offers it to/for us:That we are surrender/submit/sacrifice ourselves to love/one-another. But all this “*abiding*”/“*love*” takes commitment. The relationship Jesus is calling us into is the one He has with-us in which He died-for us: “*this is my commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you.*” Friends, experiencing God’s love in Christ means bearing the cost of expressing Christ’s love – an act He describes as the ultimate expression of love when He says: “*No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.*” Out of love Jesus came to be-with us/because of love He died-for us – giving His life away to/for us: In His final words to His disciples He tells them/us that the test of our love – for God/others – is to do the same.

[John/Jesus: “Love”/“life” interchangeable/exchangeable/given away!Paul: “Be imitators of God/as dearly loved children live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.” (Eph 5:1-2)]

This love goes beyond mere emotions to being about life itself – but it does more/goes further:It sacrifices its own needs/wants so others/met; it freely lays down its life so that others might live. This is the love/commitment/sacrifice that we remember today/everyday as we read out the names of those who died/ensured we could live.

As we read the names of those St. Andrew’s members who fought/died on our behalf, let us remember them/give thanks, for there is no greater love than this, and live worthy of their sacrifice. This is not just a list of names.... Amen.