

ADDRESS**8 November 2015****Remembrance Sunday**

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| Ruth 3.1-5, 4.13-17 | Ruth and Boaz |
| Psalms 127 | Our need of God |
| Hebrews 9.23-28 | Christ the sacrifice |
| Mark 12.38-44 | The widow's mites |

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| <p>Help us, O Lord, to hear your word, and obey your commandments, and rejoice in your love. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN</p> |
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The Old Testament is in large part, a national remembrance, a collection of the memories of the Jewish people, the stories which define their identity; stories which reveal their growing understanding of the nature and being of God. So today, we read part of the story of Ruth, the young widow from a foreign country who was accepted into the Jewish nation. She was a Moabite, from the people who were the traditional enemies of the Israelites, yet she became one of the ancestors of the mighty King David, and so became one of the ancestors of Jesus the Messiah.

The book of Ruth is not just one of the world's great short stories – it is a story with a message. Many Jews opposed mixed marriages, on racial grounds, or on religious grounds, and found support in a number of passages in their Scriptures. Yet, in this book, the anonymous author condemns these prejudices. He records that a foreign woman, probably a woman with a darker skin than most Jews, was the great grand-mother of the most revered of all their kings. He recalled events of the past in order to deal with issues of the present. That is good remembrance.

Racial prejudice is still with us, in one form or another. In the United States, inter-racial marriage was illegal in 16 States until as late as 1964, when the Supreme Court upheld an appeal by Richard and Mildred Loving, (what a wonderful name!), against their conviction in Virginia for, "cohabiting as man and wife, against the peace and dignity of the Commonwealth". They had been sentenced to a year in prison for the crime. Inter-racial marriage has never been a crime in Australia, although some States controlled marriages with indigenous women, but social prejudice has often been as damaging as a prison sentence.

And Australia does have a record of racial prejudice, particularly against the Chinese. Victoria was the first colony in the British Empire to limit Chinese immigration and the first act of the new Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia was to ban the immigration of non-white people and to deport those already living here. The Prime Minister, Edmund Barton, told the house: *The doctrine of the equality of man was never intended to apply to the equality of the Englishman and the Chinaman.* We know better today, and true Christians have always known that all races are equal in the sight of God.

Now to our gospel reading. As we continue to read through the gospel of Mark, Sunday by Sunday, today we remember Jesus' story about another widow, about the poor widow whose tiny

gift to the temple treasury was in truth, greater than that of the rich people who ostentatiously gave large amounts of silver and gold.

Now our church treasurer would be quite happy for us to be giving large amounts of silver and gold, she will even accept large notes, but the point of the story is that God is not honoured by people just giving what they can easily spare, but by people going without something they value in order to give. If we all added the cost of one coffee-shop cup of coffee to what we are now giving to St Mark's, we could cover the cost of ministering to this community, and do even more. But even that does not capture the point of the story – this widow gave God all she had to live on, confident that God would provide. We are not asked to do that, but we are asked to do more.

As I read these two stories, I remembered my grandmother. She was a widow, too – her husband, had survived Gallipoli, only to be killed in the battle for Moquet Farm in the Somme in August 1916. I spent many school holidays in her little flat at Brighton Beach in Melbourne. My proudest moment was when she let me feed her pennies into the gas meter, so she could cook dinner. But sometimes we had a cold dinner because Nana had run out of pennies – the government of the day had been slow to grant a war widows' pension and the amount was always so small that many widows were forced to rely on their friends or their extended family simply to survive. Even years later, the money often ran out before the end of the fortnight.

It is one thing to remember, to think about the past, to remember those who died in action, or came home wounded, and to remember their partners and their children; it is much harder to be active in helping heal their wounds of war. Sometimes we prefer to rewrite the past, so that our remembrance is less painful. So the trenches of the Somme become the scene of heroic struggles against an evil and vicious enemy, rather than an ugly stalemate, of death and sleepless suffering, of pools of mud and blood. A stalemate in which thousands of young men on both sides were killed or wounded, without any real movement in the front line.

We are still denying justice to some of the men and women who fought in Vietnam, and in other wars, and to their children, while the government haggles over less important things, like the inscription on the grave of the Unknown Soldier in Canberra – does Keating have better words than Kipling? should the familiar words, 'known unto God', be replaced by, 'We do not know this Australian's name, we never will'. More words do not always carry more meaning.

So it is with our Christian faith -- we may prefer to remember the good old days, rather than to deal with today's concerns. We may remember the 50s and the 60s, when Australia was recognisably a Christian country, when this church was filled every Sunday, when newspapers ran excerpts from Sunday sermons, and Sunday sport could not start before 11am or 12 noon, so that people would not be tempted to skip church.

Those were the good old days, as some people remember them. Today many people worry more about resurgent Islam or competition from Buddhism and other religions, than about the growth of literalism and fundamentalism, and the decline in Christian practice and Christian influence. We are not concerned enough about today's threats to religious expression: about politicians being mocked because they practice their religion, or about attempts to silence the voices of faith communities in the debates on current issues, like freedom of speech and freedom of association and same-sex marriage; or about moves to remove religious teaching from government schools. or about the bureaucratic decision to change the wording of the question on religion in next year's census to encourage more people to tick 'no religion'. We need to speak up about these things.

Faith communities may not always agree on these issues, and other people may not agree with their majority views, but they have a right to be heard alongside the voices of other groups, who often have a very small but activist membership; so they may get more attention than their numbers or their views deserve.

Last century, many of the Western churches borrowed a memorial acclamation, a remembrance, from the liturgies of the Eastern church and included it in their own liturgies. It is part of our communion service here every Sunday:

Christ has died; Christ is risen; Christ will come again

Christ has died, in the past, this we remember and honour. His death gives meaning to our life. Why Christ died is the basis of our faith. The creed says simply, *He died for our salvation*. To make us fully human again. Our communion service is a remembrance of his precious death, until his coming again. But it is much more than that, however we understand the mystery -- the body and blood of Christ give us renewed strength for the present, and a stronger hope for the future.

Christ is risen, this is a present power-full reality, a reality which gives us a more abundant life now. Christ is with us, even at the times we often fail to recognise him -- in our times of celebration and in our times of pain and of grief. Yet he celebrates with us, and he shares our pain, and if we honour him at these times, he will increase the joy of our celebration, and he will lessen our pain and our grief, as so many men and women of faith can testify.

Christ will come again, this is God's promise, and our hope for the future. This is when *God will wipe away every tear from our eyes, death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away*. The quote comes from the book of the Revelation to St John the Divine, which is a book many Christians struggle to understand, because it deals with the new heaven and the new earth, with things that are soon to come to pass. Whenever 'soon' is, in God's calendar.

Last month, the Synod of our diocese, the Parliament of the Church, met again for five days and nights. The daily Bible studies, before each business session began, were from the book of the Revelation – we were being asked to consider the events of the past and the concerns of the present in the light of our glorious future. Remembering the past, and linking the past with the present and with the future, helps us to make sense of life; more than that, it enriches our life, so that, whatever our financial situation, whatever our family situation, whatever our health, we can have a more abundant life.

Nana's two children grew up without a father, but the extended family helped put them through school and Legacy helped them through university – Legacy is a good example of productive remembrance. The movement began in 1923, five years after the Armistice, as a Remembrance Club, to help returned servicemen in Hobart settle into civvy life and to start their own business. But two years later, 90 years ago this year, it found its true mission in helping the children of servicemen who had been killed in the war, or who had died since.

My grandfather's letters show that in serving his country, he felt he was serving God. In one of his letters from Gallipoli he wrote: *Give my love to them all and tell them I am happy, because I am doing my duty and just thanking God for all you know I have to thank Him for in bringing me so far.* But he is only one of 102 000 Australians, men and women, who have died in war, killed in action or died of wounds, in places as remote as the Sudan and Afghanistan.

They were not all heroes, some were adventurers, some were patriots, some were larrikins; some **were** serving God, Queen and Empire, some of them simply needed a job. As we remember them, we all need to make sure that we put remembrance into action, by making sure that the men and women who have come back, and their families, their partners and their children, are given all the help they need to find a satisfying life in the country they served. We also need to remember innocent civilians caught up in conflict, in Syria and elsewhere, and do what we can to help them .

Even more, those who honour Christ as their Saviour and Lord honour the past, but they live fully in the present and look forward eagerly to the future. We remember the Christ who died, and rose again, and returned to the Father who sent him. So we honour him in the way we live our lives, and do what we can to minister to the needs of others, as he did. But we are only human, so we can do this only in the strength which comes from Jesus' presence with us, and within us, day after day, and in the certain knowledge that he will return, and he will put an end to death and to mourning and to crying and to pain – to all that diminishes our lives.

Let us pray. Christ has died; Christ is risen; Christ will come again. Alleluia, come Lord Jesus!

AMEN