

**Sermon: Sharing Remembrance Text: Isaiah 2:1-5 Remembrance Sunday,  
November 7, 2021 - Rev. Steve Clifton- Rideau Park United Church, Ottawa ON**

Scott Momadee, a member of the Kaiwa First Nation wrote of his life as a young boy. He told of being taken early one morning by his father to the cottage of an elder, a woman steeped in the traditions of their people. There his father left him. All day long the elder told him the story of the Kaiwa:

.....the beginnings of the tribe at the headwaters of the Yellowstone River,

.....the movement of the Kaiwa south into Nebraska and Kansas,

.....the wars with other tribes

.....the buffalo hunts,

.....the coming of the white man,

.....the terrible winters,

.....moving on south and finally being conquered by the white soldiers and settlers and being moved to a reservation in southern Oklahoma.

She told the story of the Kaiwa people and she recited their songs. At sunset his father came for him. Mr. Momadee writes of his day spent hearing the stories from his elder: He wrote *'I left her house a Kaiwa'*.

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Today we remember. We remember those who sacrificed, in many conflicts ... in two World Wars, the Korean War, the Cold War, in peace keeping, in Afghanistan....

We remember... those who have died, those who have served... and we might remember those who still carry the wounds of conflict within. We can remember that 1/3 of Afghan veterans report difficulty in adjusting back to civilian life, that Afghan vets report high rates of PTSD, in part due to the high number of tours that Canadian combatants served in that recent war. We can note that five per cent of homeless people here in Ottawa are identified as veterans.

Veterans of war may hold memories that they would like not to remember, memories that they cannot forget. Many of those memories are not shared, or are spoken of rarely.

In a recent CBC interview Rob Martin, a veteran of Afghanistan, spoke of the struggles that some veterans have with PTSD. He spoke of suppressing memory, and of pushing down the emotions that the memories bring, which leads to the suppression of all emotions, which leaves

some veterans feeling empty, lifeless, disconnected from life. The suppression of painful memory for some veterans can take a toll as their minds and their bodies struggle to carry the unspoken trauma of war.

On this Remembrance Sunday it is not just the fallen that we remember: it is also those whose lives were never the same again – soldiers, sailors and airmen, and their families and friends. Remembrance Day is a chance to share in the silence of those affected by war, to try to listen, to try to understand even if we ourselves do not remember war.

For those of us who cannot remember for ourselves, for those who have not lived through war and conflict, we may sometime hear the stories of those who have, when they bless us by sharing what they remember.

Ministers have the privilege of hearing many stories. I might share a few this morning so that together we may remember.

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I was sharing a service at a senior`s home and invited people to reflect on what they had to be thankful for...After the service an elderly woman, with a bright English accent shared a story with me.

In 1940, she was a school girl living in the English city of Coventry. The German Luftwaffe was bombing her city; Coventry, an industrial metal working city, would be completely destroyed in November of 1940. She was then 8 years old and she and her 6 year old sister were sent to rural Leicestershire to keep them safe from the bombing.

One morning as they left the bomb shelter where they had spent the night to head to school, they could see German bombers passing overhead, returning from a bombing raid on an English city. The 2 girls were making their way across the fields toward school when she saw one of the German planes dip and turn, now diving quickly in their direction. She ran, pulling her sister along with her, as the German plane opened fire on them. They were terrified but escaped the machine gun bullets. And now all these years later, when she thinks about being thankful, she remembers that morning and is thankful for all the years she has lived since that day.

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I officiated at a funeral for a Polish man, living much of his life here in Ottawa, who lived into his late 90s. When he was in his 80s he went into the Heart Institute here in Ottawa for a procedure. In recovery his doctor came and asked him about his heart. When they did the surgery, they found that this man`s heart was backwards, turned around 180 degrees from normal. A very strange thing.

And so he shared a story he had never told before, even to his wife and family. After the invasion of Poland he had been arrested for insulting Hitler in a tavern a bit too loudly. He spent the rest of the war in Nazi Labour camps as punishment. Near war`s end, the camp he was

working in outside of Vienna was bombed and he was severely wounded. One of his fellow prisoners saved his life; a surgeon by training he opened the man`s chest in the open air and in the process of saving him, turned his heart around before sewing him back up again.

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On the morning of Nov 11 1918, 103 years ago, a young Canadian infantryman was with his squad in Belgium. His name was Claude.

Claude grew up in rural eastern Ontario, lived in the small village where I then lived, and his family farmed land that was mainly rock, soil stretched thin over the Canadian Shield. Their life was hard. They raised some skinny cows, grew meager crops, cut lumber...When war was declared he was eager to join. A uniform. 3 square meals a day. Adventure in a foreign land. And he would be home by Christmas. He enlisted in 1914 and as he was just 15 years old he lied about his age to get into the army.

When he arrived in England, his birth date was discovered. A fifteen year old could not be sent into combat on the Western Front. So he was sent north, to Scotland. He served as a tree cutter and lumberman. Logs and lumber were needed to make battlements and to shore up trenches. In 1917 Claude turned 18, and he was transferred to the infantry. He was sent into battle and as the war neared its end, he was in Belgium.

On Remembrance Day morning 103 years ago Claude and his squad were tasked with securing a barn in the Belgian countryside. They found it was occupied by German machine gunners. On Nov 11 1918 years ago, just hours before the Armistice would be declared, Claude and his companion threw grenades into the barn and killed the German soldiers inside.

It was more than 7 decades after this event when Claude shared this memory with me. As he approached another Remembrance Day he remembered November 11 1918. The events of that morning in Belgium weighed on him still.

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Today we remember... we think of those who were and are marked by war and conflict, who held memories shared, or not shared...

And with the Prophet Isaiah we look to the day when "swords will be beaten into ploughshares, spears into pruning hooks, the day when nation will take up sword against nation nor will they train for war anymore..." Amen