

**Sermon: “An Act of Remembrance” Remembrance Sunday November 8 2020
Rideau Park United Church, Ottawa ON Rev. Steve Clifton - Rev. Jenni Leslie**

ONE: Today we try to remember. It is easy to forget. With poems shared and stories told, we remember. At the going down of the sun and in the morning, we will remember them.

TWO: **Nellie McClung** was a writer, a staunch Methodist who supported the proposal for church union and became an enthusiastic member of the new United Church in 1925; she was an activist, one of the famous 5 who worked to achieve recognition of women and children under Canadian law;. In this excerpt from her memoirs, she writes as a mother whose son is going to war.

“In my diary I wrote that day, Dec. 4th, 1915: This morning we said good-bye to our dear son Jack, at the CNR station where snow lay fresh and white on the roofs and on the streets, white and soft, and pure as a young heart.

When we came home, I felt strangely tired and old, though I am only forty-two. But I know that my youth has departed from me. It has gone with Jack, our beloved, our first born, the pride of our hearts. Strange fate, surely, for a boy who has never had a gun in his hands, whose ways are gentle, and full of peace; who loves people, pities their sorrows and would gladly help them to solve problems.

What have I done to you, in letting you go into this inferno of war? And how could I hold you back without breaking your heart?”

TWO: In October, 1917, a young Canadian soldier named **Talbot Papineau** wrote to his mother about his experience in the trenches and his love and concern for her and his family.

ONE: “October 29, 1917

Dearest Mother, After all, I have been able to write to you again before going over. We have been fortunate so far and all things are cheerful. I have even shaved this morning in a little dirty water. I was delighted last night to get two letters from you, and a box of candy which I have actually carried with me and have enjoyed. It was a cold night and I slept only about one hour. Also a noisy night, I can assure you, and the earth full of vibrations.

I hope by the same mail you receive another letter from me to say all is successfully over. But of course it may be difficult or impossible to write for a few days, so don't worry.

There seems so little to say when if only I knew what was to happen I might want to say so much. These would be poor letters to have as last ones but you must know with what a world of love they are written. Always remember that I could not love thee so well, or you love me,

did I not love honour more. You have given me courage and strength to go very happily and cheerfully into the good fight. Love to all and a big hug for thee, my dear brave little mother.

Talbot...

Nov. 5, 1917

Mrs. L.J.Papineau.

Dear Madam: In confirmation of my telegram to you of yesterday's date I regret exceedingly to inform you that an official report has been received to the effect that Capt. A/Major T.M.Papineau, M.C. PPCLI was killed in action on October 30, 1917

Yours truly,

J.M.Knowles, Lieutenant

ONE: "*This Was My Brother*", a poem by Mona Gould

Mona Gould, a Canadian poet, was still a child when her brother left to fight in the Second World War. In a poem, she remembered him....

TWO:

This was my brother

At Dieppe.

Quietly a hero
Who gave his life
Like a gift.
Withholding nothing.
His youth ... his love ...
His enjoyment of being alive ...
His future, like a book
With half the pages still uncut -

This was my brother
At Dieppe ...
The one who built me a doll house
When I was seven,
Complete to the last small picture frame,

Nothing forgotten.
He was awfully good at fixing things,
At stepping into the breach when he was needed.
That's what he did at Dieppe.

He was needed.

And even death must have been a little ashamed
At his eagerness.

TWO: Combatants are casualties in war. We remember too that hundreds of thousands of civilians - children, women, and men - have been harmed by war, too. A Canadian journalist, **Olivia Ward**, published in the Toronto Star an account of the aftermath of war in Belgrade:

ONE:" Jelena, the arthritic flower-seller is back on the steps of the National Theatre, spreading her brightly coloured dried posies to lure the passersby. It's a reassuring sign, a glimpse of normality, a fleeting hope that everything is just as it was.

'Sometimes it seems as though the war never really happened,' a friend says to me as we walk through the familiar streets of Belgrade together for the first time since I left at the point of a gun last spring. ' But then', she adds, 'we remember the conditions we live under. And we can never forget for a moment.

The conditions are not immediately obvious, I realized, pushing my way through the crazily weaving traffic, the hundreds of strollers and shoppers, the stray dogs and loiterers outside cafes.

Belgrade is not Grozny, flattened and desolate, its crumbling ruins a pedestrian peril. It is not Pristina, with out-of-control looters and killers in the smashed streets.

In Belgrade's gray downtown core, the faces of the buildings tell little about the nights of anguish during the bombing. But the faces of the people tell their own stories. Bleak, withdrawn into themselves, wary. Wondering how they will get through the morning, the week, and the rest of their lives.

'People are just aimless, stunned in a way', says my Belgrade friend, a writer. 'They don't have any hope for the future. Each family has its horror story: death, trauma, brokenness. Violence, demoralization, economic disasters, conflict between groups and within families - all of these are part of the war.

'It's like the last days of something', says my friend with a shiver, as we round the corner. 'But what?' The question hangs in the chilly air.

On the steps of the theatre, Jelena bends painfully to retrieve her unsold flowers, packing each small bouquet carefully in strips of newspaper. In case someone would buy. In case, tomorrow, there would be something to buy flowers for.”

ONE: Canadians remember the sacrifice of war through the symbol of the poppy, a red flower that bloomed in the fields of Europe, where war twice waged in the last century. In this century too Canadians served in war near fields’ red with poppies, as these flowers bloom on the plains of Afghanistan too. A NATO soldier in Afghanistan, John Hawkhead, wrote this poem in 2009:

TWO: Helmand Province

Night on the cold plain,
invisible sands lift,
peripheral shadows stir,

space between light and dark
shrouding secrets;
old trades draped grey.

Here too poppies fall,
petals blown on broken ground,
seeds scattered on stone

and this bright bloom,
newly cropped,
leaves pale remains,

fresh lines cut;
the old sickle wind
sharp as yesterday.

ONE: At the going down of the sun and in the morning, we will remember them.

TWO: Eternal rest grant unto them, O God, and may perpetual light shine on them.
May the souls of the righteous, through your great mercy, rest in peace....