

14 November 2021

West Kirk of Calder & Polbeth Harwood

By: Rev Dr Nanda Groenewald

Reading: Habakkuk 3:1-2 & 17-19

Remembrance Sunday

Today we remember all those who paid the ultimate sacrifice, to allow us to live in freedom and peace.

Why is it important to remember?

Because we should never become complacent, and forget that the price paid for our freedom cost human lives.

It's only by remembering the past, that we will be able to have a meaningful future.

The passage we read together from the Bible was written by the prophet Habakkuk. He wrote about trusting God in uncertain times.

Uncertain times... That is not something we are unfamiliar with. Habakkuk experienced it all those years ago; our ancestors experienced it during war-time; we still experience it today.

As a prophet, it was Habakkuk's job to tell the people what God expected of them. To remind them that they were never alone.

But he was starting to feel hopeless; he just couldn't stand it anymore.

Everything was going wrong. The only news he brought the people was bad news. They were in one conflict after another, and he felt as if his cries for peace just ended up in more war.

He felt as if he and his people had nothing left. Literally nothing.

*The fig tree didn't bud, and there were no grapes on the vines,
the olive crops failed, and the fields produced no food,
there were no sheep in the pen, and no cattle in the stalls.*

The earth was bare, and their lives were empty.

And just as he was ready to give up on life altogether, God prompted him to think about the past. To remember.

And as he remembered, it dawned on him that this was not the first time in the history of Israel that things were looking grim. And as he remembered, he realised that *every single time* in the past, without fail, God got them through whatever hardship they were facing.

And at that, the prophet started singing a song of praise to the glory of God.

His circumstances didn't change, but his attitude did.

Even though the earth was bare, and his life was empty, he remembered that he wasn't alone.

He realised that even when it feels as if there is nothing, there is always *something*.

Like the poppies in the barren, war-stricken fields of the 1st and 2nd World Wars.

Beautifully growing in places of complete destruction and devastation.

Almost shouting to the skies – don't give up!

Even when you feel as if there is nothing left, there is still hope.

Even in the no-mans-land of this world... There is hope.

Even in the trenches of your life... There is hope.

If we remember the past, we will never lose hope for the future.

Because God is there.

Making us sure-footed as dear when we find ourselves in the rocky, scary, dangerous parts of life.

Where I grew up in South Africa, there was a species of antelope called a Klipspringer.

I could never understand how these antelopes could be so sure-footed on the rocks and the cliffs, especially if you take a closer look at their

hoofs: It almost looks as if they are standing on their tippy-toes. No claws. And yet, not a single one will slip and fall.

They can outrun even the most dangerous predators on slopes and rocky terrain.

So they deliberately go to dangerous places, to keep themselves safe.

And the same God who made these incredible animals, made us too.

He made us to survive. And to do more than only survive. He made us to make a difference.

This year marks 100 years since the first poppy was sold. The sign of hope.

Let's be like the poppies of this world. Bringing hope in devastation.

Changing empty, bare lives into beautiful displays of colour.

No matter what is going on around us, life is worth living.

Living through difficult times reminds us that we are strong, and that we are on our way to something better.

And how do I know that? Because God is with us. He always has been and he always will be.

Let's help all the people around us to remember that too.

We don't have to take a single step in our journey through life alone – God's love surrounds us like a shield.

Let's make sure to notice *that*, and not only the hardship we so often have to face.

Countless soldiers made it possible for us to walk this journey with pride, never having to look over our shoulders.

So let's remember them.

Let's remember them like God taught us to:
focusing on the beauty, not on the barren.

Going through life as sure-footed as deer, knowing that even when we find ourselves in slippery places, we won't lose our footing.

When we can't change our circumstances, let's change our attitude.

When life feels empty, let's remember.

Because if we truly remember, we will see not only the fallen soldier, but also the freedom he brought; we will see not only the war-stricken land, but also the poppy blooming proudly.

Let's remember...

We remember, when we love, when we give.

We remember when we stop and forgive.

Amen