

John 15: 9 – 17 Remembrance Day 2018 - Charlie Boyle

As Jesus says “My command is this: love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this that he lay down his love for his friends.”

Friendship is very important. It is such a privilege to have good friends isn't it. One of my friends called me up this week from Australia, on his way home from work in Sydney. It is always lovely to be contacted out of the blue by friends. He happened to also get to speak to his godson, just before he was about to go off to Nursery. Talking of the Nursery we had a lovely Autumn Fair yesterday in the Church Hall, so thank you to all who helped organize it and supported it. Friendships are important, we all have to work at our friendships and the reason you are here today is most likely because of a friendship, someone invited you to come along, someone might even have given you a lift. The other reason you may be here at this time, on this day, is of course to remember those who gave the ultimate sacrifice of their lives for our freedom.

Last year I interviewed and videoed Sergeant Bill Mitchell, of the Royal Signals, who went to France and survived the Second World War via Dunkirk, here with us today. I remember him talking about how he slept on the beaches, using his helmet as a pillow and waking up to think he had overslept. Only to later realise that he was amongst some his friends who had not survived the previous night's bombing raid. I also recall his re-marking on the importance of friendship, the desire to return to the unit, the guys he was with, who he had fought with. When you go through tough times, you know who your friends are, when you fight in battle together, it builds a friendship. He also spoke of how his prayers had been answered and he was convinced of the power of prayer.

The video of him talking to me is still on You Tube if you search under Bill Mitchell, Dunkirk.

This year's Remembrance Day we as a country have particularly focused on the fact that it is 100 years since Armistice Day, which marked the end of the 1st World War, the war to end all wars.

Sadly the fighting and suffering have not ceased, wars continue if not on the same worldwide scale.

We all want to live in a world of peace, where suffering and persecution have ceased.

Times have changed and will continue to change but I think that actually there is greater respect and emphasis on Remembrance Day, certainly in the media and on television there have been plenty of programmes recalling the horrific events of the First World War.

Joshua and I went to the cinema on Friday night to see *They Shall not grow old*, a harrowing, inspirational and amazing film that is basically a documentary that starts off in black and white. It then moves into colour bringing new techniques to bring archive footage of World War I into life. I think what inspired me was the lack of self-pity, the desire of the

young men to enlist and serve their country, even when many were underage from as young as 14 people were keen to serve their country. There were scenes of horror and devastation, scenes of heroism and compassion but also hilarity and humour. At the end, of course, many soldiers returned, although over 1 million British and Commonwealth men died, many on their return said it was hard to find work. Another said I returned to my old place of work of the department store and someone said to him “where have you been these past years night she saw something” if you want to see it is on BBC tonight at 9:30pm.

The programme reminded me of the loss of life in my own family, the phantom pains and sleepless nights my grandfather endured after he lost his eye and his leg. That suffering that was endured as a result of war, does not end just because a peace treaty has been signed. The consequences of war continue in the physical and mental health of those who have fought in war, as well as those who have survived and been left behind, as it still does for those who have fought in more recent wars and continues today as **Prince Harry's Invictus** games bears witness. But it also reminded me of those from this Parish, whose names we have just turned to and stood in front of at 11am. Those whose bodies did not come back from the trenches but are left in cemeteries in Europe, those whose lives were interrupted by the horrors of war, whose families lived with the loss for years to come.

Remembering is a good thing, whether we have memories that are failing or not as good as they used to be, the act of remembering helps us to give thanks. To stop and reflect on those who have given the ultimate sacrifice of their lives for others, for our relative freedom and peace.

You may recall that 3 of the names on the Memorial plaque are from the same family, the Woodroffe family who lost 3 of their 4 sons, with father Henry, who used to live in Branksome Wood Road. Leslie who got the Military cross, was the eldest who was born in 1885, educated at Marlborough College, who went on to teach at Shrewsbury school and died as a Captain of the 8th Battalion Rifle Brigade in June 1916, being wounded in the same battle as his brother, who is the only one to have a grave in France. Kenneth, was the one with the sporting genes in the family, playing both for Hampshire, Cambridge University and Sussex. He was the first to join the army and perhaps not surprisingly was the first to die in action near Neuve-Chappelle in France in May 1915. The fourth and youngest son, Sidney who won the Victoria Cross has been described as *“one of the bravest of the brave”*. In being awarded the VC the commanding officer wrote to his father describing how brave his 19 year old son had been saying *“your younger boy was simply one of the bravest of the brave and the work he did that day will stand out as a record hard to beat...saving one corporal whose face was badly burnt from death by picking him up from the trench. When the line was attacked and broke into his right he still held his trench, and only when the Germans were discovered to be in the rear of him did he leave it. He then withdrew his remaining men very skillfully away, and worked his way alone back to me to report. He finally brought his unit back, and then took part in the counter-attack. He was killed out in front, in the open, cutting wire to enable the attack to be continued. He risked his life for others right through the day and finally gave it sake his own men. He was always bold as a lion, confident and sure of himself. The loss he is to me personally is very great, as I have learnt to appreciate what a*

sterling fine lad he was. His men would've followed him anywhere." He was awarded the Victoria Cross just 5 weeks later for his conspicuous bravery.

It is a story of heroism, selflessness and a lack of self-pity that we would do well to emulate.

In an age of the individual, of our needs over others, we are reminded of the selfless nature of God. Father God who sent his one and only son to die on the cross for our sins and mistakes.

The friendship that brings a peace that passes all understanding.

It is the greatest privilege of all to have a friendship with Jesus. He calls you and me friends and shed his blood as the ultimate act of friendship.

True friendship involves more than unquestioning approval. I am so grateful to good friends who have pointed out my faults and yet born with them over the years, with great sensitivity and grace.

But the ultimate act of grace and love has been that Jesus laid down his life for you and me. He has chosen each one of us, to bear fruit, to love each other. I am Christ's friend and he is mine, when we love each other, when we turn to each other in friendship, we find that peace in our hearts that the world can't give. We find that place in heaven, where those who have gone before us have gone. Lest we forget that greater love has no-one than this the he lay down his life for his friends. We are his friends, if we but call out to him, like those who died in the trenches did over 100 years ago, for our freedom and relative peace in Europe that we enjoy today.

Amen.

The sermon preached is always different from the sermon written...