

Sermon
Sunday, November 10th, 2024
Remembrance Sunday
Church of the Ascension, Ottawa
The Reverend Victoria Scott

Readings: [Isaiah 25:6-9; Psalm 116:1-8; 1 Peter 1:3-9; John 6:37-40](#)

Diana, Kate and I spent yesterday and Friday at the annual Synod of our Diocese. Our guest speaker was the Rev. Dr. Dawn Davis, Assistant Professor of Contextual Theology and Director of Leadership for Ministry Programs at Huron University College in London, Ontario. She offered three reflections over the course of our two days together, and she started the first one by asking us two questions. Before she asked the questions, she invited us to pay particular attention to the words that came to mind as we thought about responding, and she also asked us to be attentive to where we felt the questions in our bodies. The first question was: “How are you?” and the second one was “How is it with your soul?”

As we gather on this Remembrance Sunday, I invite you to answer these two questions. How are you? How is it with your soul?

Where do you feel those questions in your body?

The question “How are you?” is, apparently, often felt as a “head” question, with words like “fine” quick to bubble up, and feelings and emotions either not very prominent, or kept in, stifled. The question “How is it with your soul?” is experienced differently. People describe feeling this question in their hearts, or their guts. Responses are more about feelings than words. In fact, people often can’t find words to express how it is with their souls...

Today, Remembrance Sunday, and tomorrow, November 11th, Remembrance Day. These are days when we are reminded of the conflict and violence of war: not to glorify it, but so that we never forget the sacrifices made. These are days when we hold the suffering of war and the loss and grief that come out of violent conflict.

These are days when we are invited to remember with both head and heart. My head spins and my heart breaks at what we remember today. I consider history,

and I look and listen in our world today and I am dismayed at the fragmentation and brokenness in it. I am horrified by the obscene violence in the world – both past, and present, especially in places like Ukraine, the Sudan, in the Land of the Holy One...

And yet, as a follower of Jesus, I am not without hope in both my head and my heart and soul. Today's Gospel passage is part of that hope.

On Remembrance Sunday, we hear the readings and prayers appointed for All Souls Day. We hear from John's Gospel that in and through Jesus it is God's will that nothing should be lost.

Nothing is lost. In and through Jesus, God is holding all the fragmentation and brokenness in the world. God is holding us, in all our brokenness, with love, and as we are held, we are invited into a different kind of remembering – a “re-remembering”. A re-remembering that is about putting back together, about repair and healing. A re-remembering that is about new life that is made possible in that repair and healing.

I included a poem by Luci Shaw in the newsletter this week. I share it now:

*Our prayers break on God like waves,
and he an endless shore,
and when the seas evaporate
and oceans are no more
and cries are carried in the wind
God hears and answers every sound
as he has done before.*

*Our troubles eat at God like nails.
He feels the gnawing pain
on souls and bodies. He never fails
but reassures he'll heal again,
again, again, again and yet again.*

God is always with us, holding us, reassuring us, and inviting us into healing.

We are invited to “re-member” with our heads and our hearts. If we consider today’s Gospel passage with only our heads, we might get tangled up in it, especially the bit about being raised up on the last day. What does this mean? Many have interpreted this as being about who’s in and who’s out of heaven. Many have made this a formula for exclusion – only those who believe in Jesus will be raised up. Encountering this Gospel passage with both head and heart makes this about more than a ticket to heaven. Eugene Peterson’s choice of words in the translation “The Message” are helpful in this regard. Listen to that translation:

“This, in a nutshell, is [God’s] will: that everything handed over to me by the Father be completed—not a single detail missed—and at the wrap-up of time I have everything and everyone put together, upright and whole. This is what my Father wants: that anyone who sees the Son and trusts who he is and what he does and then aligns with him will enter *real* life, *eternal* life. My part is to put them on their feet alive and whole at the completion of time.”

Alignment with Jesus. Alive and whole. Real life, eternal life. This is living word. This is word that brings together head and heart – that brings together hearts and minds and souls. There is deep comfort in this invitation to alignment, in this promise of wholeness.

The way of Jesus is a way that re-members, that puts back together, that leads to healing and wholeness. Pacifism (with a “c” as in peace-loving), non-violent resistance, compassion, kindness, connection and, of course, love: these things mend and repair. Buddhist teacher and author Pema Chodron describes life as continually falling apart and coming together, coming together and falling apart. There is movement in this. And as we move from that place of “apart” to “together” we have to consider what brought about that falling apart, and what might be in the way of life coming together again, what might be in the way of our own mending, our own healing and wholeness.

On Tuesdays when we gather for Lectio Divina, we pray this at the beginning of our prayers. It comes from the Iona Community, in Scotland.

God of grace and hope:
Help us to move from fear to trust.

Your grace surrounds and fills us:
Remind us that you provide all we need.

Fear brings about violence and destruction. Fear is the cause of so much of the fragmentation and brokenness in our world. Fear is behind so much of our own brokenness. And fear gets in the way of healing – of us as individuals, and of the world.

When Jesus says that his part is to put us “on [our] feet alive and whole at the completion of time”, this is an invitation into a continual movement from fear to trust. It’s not that we’re not allowed to feel fear, but God invites us to move from that fear to a place of trust over and over again. We’re invited to move from fear to trust that God is with us, loving us, in all of life, with all its joys and sorrows, in all its brokenness. We’ve invited to move from fear to trust that the way that Jesus was in this world is a way that will make us whole, and fully alive.

On this Remembrance Sunday, as we remember the hurts and harms of the past, as we hold the pain and sorrow of our world today and pray for peace, may we all move from fear to trust in God’s love: a love that is more than we can ask or imagine. A love that mends and heals. It is this movement from fear to trust that will change our world. May we trust, may we love. In Jesus name. Amen.