



Church of St. John the Evangelist, Elora
November 12 2023 - Twenty Fourth Sunday after Pentecost
Canon Paul Walker

There's always something so moving about Remembrance Day. I was so impressed yesterday by the unexpected moment during the ceremonies at the Elora Cenotaph of the flypast by two bi-planes and a Second World War plane, just at the end of the two minutes of silence.

The poppy banners continues to expand throughout the region and nation: Palmerston initiated a new installation this year; and Stratford had an impressive display over the William Hutt Bridge. There was a new installation at St. David's Church in Welland, and St. John's in Ancaster; a new project in Dartmouth Nova Scotia, and of course a new expression of the Poppy Project on Mill Street and on the front steps of the Wellington County Museum.

Yesterday afternoon I had the opportunity to read the Opinion essay in the Wellington Advertiser by Kelly Waterhouse, curiously entitled "Open." In her essay she is reflecting on the state of the world this year at Remembrance Day and her experience of engaging with the Poppy Project at St. John's. Every year, she says, she comes by St. John's to take a photo of the poppy project.

"I can't tell you how long it's been since I walked through the door of the church I was christened in, but

when I saw the sign outside saying "Open for Prayer," it was an invitation I felt called to accept."

After lamenting on the state of the conflicts in the world she concludes, "In the acoustic silence of the church, surrounded by stained glass windows and images of saints, I gave up trying to make sense of the world, and let the thoughts of gratitude and generational grief run their course. I prayed for peace where there is none. I prayed for hope where there is none. For light where there is darkness. For humanity to heal. I thanked the veterans whose blood lines helped birth my proudly Canadian heart.

"Alone in that sacred space it felt foreign, yet familiar. Safe. Time well spent. I placed money in the coffers, gladly, leaving lighter in spirit. Money well spent.

"Faith, like remembrance, is a deeply personal experience. I'm grateful for the open invitation. And I'm thankful for the solitude in a noisy world. Keeping the faith." (*Wellington Advertiser, November 9, 2023*)

If the impact of your work through things like the Poppy Project is enough to move and inspire one person to restore their faith and hope, then it is all worth it.

If it is one person who feels that this sacred place, that may be foreign but familiar to them, is now open, and it opens up an entire landscape of the ever present journey of faith, then it is all worth it.

If it is for the two classrooms of children who came through our doors on a field trip on Friday, or for the two women who were here yesterday afternoon from Guelph to say, “Oh, we come every year to see this,” as though it was some sacred pilgrimage site, then it’s all worth it.

If it’s for the gentleman who came in to pray and said “I haven’t been here for years, but I saw the sign and came in,” then it’s worth it. When he asked what was happening here for Christmas, I took his question as an opportunity to invite him back for more. “Oh,” he said, “I should come.”

What you are doing is inspiring the lives of not one, but countless numbers of people, most of whom you will never meet or have the pleasure to know. You are inspiring them through anthems, liturgies, poppies, puddings and prayers. Through your food security programs, flower displays, and live-streams. Through your song circles, compline services and children’s choirs. If through any of that work you are bringing one person in to the light whose world is filled with darkness, or one person into hope whose world is filled with despair, or one person into faith whose life is filled with fear, then it is all worth it.

In a world that is unstable, insecure, and overwhelmed with accusation, judgement and violence, Jesus looked at the crowds with compassion as though they

were like sheep without a shepherd and said, “follow me.”

To those who were despairing and hopeless, paralyzed and blind, hungry and thirsty, Jesus restored them, fed them and healed them and said, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

Like for them, our world is very similar. And like them, we do not grieve as those who have no hope.

Like our veterans who served and gave their lives for us, we live for a world where there is a voice stronger than hatred, a word more powerful than death, and a kingdom more lasting than any we have ever belonged to on earth. That voice, that word, and that kingdom is the “day-spring from on high that has visited us.” And it has visited us “to give light to them that sit in darkness and the shadow of death, and to guide our feet into the way of peace.”

This is a voice I want to listen to; a word I want to read, and a kingdom I want to belong to. From my perspective what I see through your work it is what you say, you do, and you be for others, and that is why we continue to exist, and that is why we will look to a future with open doors, and that is why we are blessed.

“O taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the one that trusts in him.”