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Christ Church West Wimbledon
Sermon : Remembrance Sunday ~ November 13, 2017

I knew a man once who was born and bred in Edinburgh in 1920. After he left school at 14, he trained to be a mechanic for the Ford Motor Company. When he was 19, the war broke out and he went off to fight. Three years later in 1942, he stepped on a mine, which blew up – and he lost his sight at the age of 22. Clearly he couldn't go back to being a motor mechanic – so he retrained as a physiotherapist – where touch more than sight was all important – he married a woman who had nursed him, and they went onto to raise three sons, although he never knew what they or his wife looked like. He was a strong independent minded man, who would not let his disability get him down. He became very involved politically, serving as a local and county councillor, and also stood as a candidate in two General Elections. He was a keen sportsman, taking part in race walking and, in later years, played golf. He died at the age of 66. That is the brief story of one of the casualties of war – a man who, despite his blindness, went on to lead as near a normal life as you could imagine.

There are lots of men and women like him still alive today, who, like us, will be remembering, remembering especially those who have given their lives on behalf of others in wars and many other conflicts and acts of terror which, year by year seem to grow more frequent and terrifying – and that much closer to home. And as the casualties grow, so the age seems to lower so that there are now many young service men and women who are permanently disabled. Nor do we simply remember today those who died in the armed forces. There are civilian casualties of war, damage to the environment and the high cost borne by animals. That is the tragedy of war. There are no winners. We all bear its scars.

But there have been great sacrifices and countless acts of bravery in war. There have been dreams of a better world. So as we remember, so we also look forward. When we do so, we are aware of resurrection. Good Friday is needed to lead to the glory of Easter morning. Most of those who fought in the 2nd world war did so believing that it was a war to end wars, that a lasting peace would be achieved, that there would be freedom for all and an end to oppression and injustice. Sadly they were wrong and there have been more than a hundred wars since then and there is still great inequality and injustice in our world. But the Christian hope remains. Death is not the end but a transition to new life. We remember today with thanksgiving, looking back if we can, but most of all we look forward to resurrection.

In our Gospel reading today, the story contrasts the foolish and the wise bridesmaids. When the bridegroom finally appears, the wise are ready and go to the wedding, but the foolish are not and so miss out on their opportunity.

As Christians, we know we must always be ready to give an account of our lives at any time. There are no days off in Christian discipleship, no limited hours of service. We cannot rewrite the conditions of being a disciple of Christ just to suit ourselves. No, we have to be prepared to live each day ready for adventure in Christian discipleship, for to be unprepared may make all the difference for someone who needs our help or our prayers or our support.

So today we remember those who have given their lives for our freedom and we pledge to continue to pursue peace – and whilst we cannot affect the world as can our governments and leaders, we can work tirelessly in our community, amongst the neighbours we know and the strangers we don't know – for each of us is capable of making a difference because of how we live our lives.

Oh, and the man blinded in the war who I told you about at the start – sorry, didn't I say – he was my Father.