

## No Greater Love

*preached by Rev. Paul Sakasov on November 11, 2018*

John 15:12-17

12 'This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. 13 No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. 14 You are my friends if you do what I command you. 15 I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. 16 You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. 17 I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.

This morning as we gather in God's presence, we stand together with millions of people all over the world to remember the great sacrifices others have made on our behalf. This morning as we solemnly recognize those who fought for our freedom and those who continue to put themselves in harms way to advance the common good, we remember that the freedom we have and the prosperity we enjoy today was purchased at a great cost.

For only a short while ago, 8.5 million lives were claimed in World War I. That was more than the population of Canada in 1914. Then in World War II 61 million people perished. That was more than five times the population of Canada in 1939. Indeed our freedom was purchased with rivers of blood.

And while most people my age and younger have no comprehension of the sacrifices that were made to keep our land glorious and free, there are still many people we know who have seen the horrors of war first hand. And there are still many people who we know who have lived in a world where luxuries were non-existent and the necessities of life like: flour, butter, eggs, and milk were rationed. There are many people who we know who have seen war break families apart, shatter dreams, and take hope for the future away.

There are many people we know who have personally experienced the cost of our freedom. There are many people we know who have paid a hidden tax, in the form of suffering, so that we could peacefully come to this warm cosy church; on

nicely paved roads, in comfortable vehicles, with food in our stomachs, and fancy clothes on our backs.

Indeed a great debt has been paid on our behalf. For over the years many lives have been lost on the altar of freedom, including Jesus Christ, who said on the night before he died, “Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.”

So, today as we gather on Remembrance Day, we honour their sacrifice, and we remember their love and we pledge ourselves to live our lives in a manner worthy of the gift that has been given to us.

And today, as we gather in the house of God, we pledge ourselves to fight against evil and injustice following the example of our Lord, Jesus Christ, who showed a love that is even greater than the kind he mentioned to his disciples in John 15.

For not only did he die for them. And not only did he die for his family. Not only did he die for his country. Not only did he die for the world. But, contrary to human nature, Christ died for his enemies too.

As the Apostle Paul writes in Romans 5:6-8 “You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. <sup>7</sup>Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. <sup>8</sup> But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

Now this is true love. This is the ultimate sacrifice. To give your life for people who don't deserve it. To give your life for those who have done you harm. To give your life for people like Pilate, who ordered Jesus' flogging and crucifixion. To give your life for people like the soldiers who nailed Jesus to the cross and gambled for his clothes. To give your life for a person like the sinner on the cross, a convicted felon who earned his sentence, and continued to show spite as he mocked Jesus with his dying words. “Greater love has no one than this.”

What a testimony. What an example. What a challenge! Can you imagine loving this way?

In Luke 6 Jesus says, “But I tell you who hear me: Love your enemies, do good to

those who hate you, 28 bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. 29 If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other also. If someone takes your cloak, do not stop him from taking your tunic. 30 Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. Love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. 36 Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

In Romans 12:20-21 the Apostle Paul writes, “If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals (which is another way of saying, ‘you will bring healing’) on his head.” 21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”

This is the calling we have been given as Christians. This is the war we have been called to fight. This is the sacrifice we have called to make on the altar of freedom. And even though we don’t want to do it, and even though it goes against our very nature to fulfill it, something within us tells us, this is the answer.

For in these commands, “love your enemies,” and “do good to those who hate you,”...there is power. There is the power to change our lives and there is power to change the world.

For when we love; when we are patient; when we are kind; when we do not envy; when we do not boast; when we are not proud; when we are not rude; when we are not self-seeking; when we are not easily angered; when we keep no record of wrongs; when we do not delight in evil but when we rejoice in the truth; when we protect, when we trust; when we hope; when we persevere; when we love, there is peace. When we love war ceases. When we love, the world is made a better place. When we love the words of the prophet Isaiah will have come true:

“In the last days the mountain of the LORD’s temple will be established as chief among the mountains; it will be raised above the hills, and all nations will stream to it. 3 Many peoples will come and say, “Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths.” The law will go out from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. 4 He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into

pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore. 5 Come, O house of Jacob, let us walk in the light of the LORD.” (Isaiah 2)

This is the fruit of love. This is the fruit of walking in Christ’s footsteps. For when we love we will no longer be at war within ourselves; struggling between selfishness and selfless living. When we love our families will stay together, and we will treasure each other’s company. When we love, we will be at peace with the environment and we will actively promote its health. When we love we will live in unity with the poor. When we love we will not spend our precious resources preparing for war, but, we will use them to promote peace. When we love, we shall see our salvation.

When we love we fulfill the command of Christ and we remain in his love. When we love, we honour the sacrifice that Christ has made on our behalf. When we love, we honour the sacrifice made by millions who have gone before us. When we love, we commit ourselves to a calling that is worth dying for.

So as we remember on this Remembrance Day, let us go and serve the world with the love of Christ. Let us be his hands and feet in a broken world. Let us go in faith believing God will give us the strength to live out our calling. And as we go, let us take up the battle cry of St. Francis, who said:

Make me a channel of your peace: where there is hatred let me bring your love; where there is injury your healing power, and where there’s doubt, true faith in you.

Make me a channel of your peace; where there’s despair in life let me bring hope; where there is darkness only light, and where there’s sadness, ever joy.

Make me a channel of your peace; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned, in giving to all that we receive, and in dying that we’re born to eternal life.

O Spirit, grant that I may never seek so much to be consoled as to console, to be understood as to understand, to be loved as to love with all my soul.

Make me a channel of your peace. As we remember, may God help us to live according to this prayer. Amen.