

## **John 15:9-17 Remembrance Day and Jesus' sacrifice.**

As Remembrance Day this year falls on a Sunday, it gives us an opportunity to reflect on it from a Christian perspective.

Remembrance Day is one of those celebrations where Australians, regardless of their religion or culture, pause to remember the sacrifice of those who gave their lives for our country. Increasingly, it is also a time when we remember those who returned home to tell the tale, often wounded and scarred in more ways than just physical.

This Remembrance Day is even more significant, in that it marks 100 years since the end of WW1.

For Australia, as for many nations, the First World War remains the most costly conflict in terms of deaths and casualties. From a population of what was then fewer than five million, 416,809 men enlisted, of which over 60,000 were killed and 156,000 wounded, gassed, or taken prisoner.

The Australian War Memorial notes that 46 Australian women lost their lives in WW1

So many deaths. In my naivety, I've often wondered why governments back then didn't employ the champion approach to conflict. What's that, you ask? It's where the champion from one side of a conflict does battle with the champion from the other side. The champions fight to the death, and the winner takes all. Only one life lost. You'll remember David & Goliath. That was the champion approach. Jews 1, Philistines 0.

But I guess that's a bit simplistic. In today's scene, it wouldn't sell enough weapons, and arms dealers would not be happy. War is a lucrative business.

I digress...

Regardless of the logic or otherwise of war, there can be no doubt that to give one's life for one's country remains the supreme sacrifice - an act of undeniable heroism.

We often hear this verse from John 15 quoted at Remembrance Day and ANZAC Day ceremonies:

“Greater love has no one than this; that one lay down one's life for one's friends.”

However, at such times, this verse is often given the wrong emphasis. The emphasis is on the sacrifice, and the heroism displayed in giving up one's life for one's country in a time of war. If read this verse in the context of the whole passage, we find the emphasis is not on heroism, but on something entirely different.

Listen again to Jesus' words:

“As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. You are my friends if you do what I command.

What is Jesus focus in this passage? (LOVE)

And when Jesus says that there is no greater love than laying down one’s life for one’s friends, he is saying that this is the supreme demonstration of love, not a supreme act of heroism.

Many of us have, or have had, heroes. They may be sporting heroes, they may be performers or actors, they may be public figures.

So what’s hero?

We find heroes in three contexts:

The first is in mythology or legends where a hero is a person, often of divine ancestry, who was endowed with great courage and strength, celebrated for their bold exploits, and favoured by the gods.

A second context is where a person is noted for feats of courage or nobility of purpose, especially risking or sacrificing his or her life. Remembrance Day celebrates this kind of hero.

A third context is where a hero is a person noted for special achievement in a particular field, such as an olympic gold medalist, or a winner of the Nobel Peace Prize.

In a sense, you could call Jesus a hero, couldn’t you? If you want to use the first definition, he certainly was someone of divine ancestry, endowed with great courage and strength, celebrated for bold exploits. In Jesus’ case, we could consider the miracles in that category.

We could also call Jesus a hero according to the second definition – someone celebrated for nobility of purpose, and one who risked or sacrificed his life. He certainly did that!

And the third definition? Someone noted for special achievement in a particular field. Well for Jesus that’s an understatement. He achieved salvation for humankind, and he changed the world in the process.

No doubt about it – Jesus was and is a hero.

However, the thing about heroes is that people usually revere them from a distance. They may admire them enough to imitate them – even adopt their values, but because heroes are distant, they have no real impact on people's lives.

Sadly – Jesus can often be just a hero to people. They may know all about him. They may respect and admire him. They may be so taken with him that they determine to imitate him – but he remains personally distant, and so there is no great problem if they lose interest.

Today's Gospel reading lays out what our relationship with Jesus should REALLY be. It takes Jesus from the realm of hero, to his rightful place as Lord. It shifts the emphasis from heroism to loving service.

“As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you. Now remain in my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.”

This is so different from the relationship we have with our heroes!

For a start, our relationship with Jesus is **intimate**. It is a relationship of **love** – not distant admiration or respect.

Take a moment and think about the person you love most in all the world. This no doubt will be a person you spend a lot of time with. You enjoy their company. You want to please them. It would break your heart to hurt them or cause them any pain. Most probably, you would do anything for this person if they asked it of you – because you love them and they love you.

This picture of intimate love is just a pale reflection of the love the Father has for Jesus. It is a pale reflection of the love Jesus has for you and for me. Jesus' love for us is **deep**. It is **committed**. It is **sacrificial**.

This love of Jesus is the atmosphere in which we, as his disciples, live! It's not just something we realise in a momentary crisis. It's not a mystical experience. Jesus's love is something we enjoy **continuously**.

**There is a second way in which our relationship with Jesus is different from that of a hero.**

If we are truly disciples of Jesus, his deep love for us and our intimate relationship with him will evoke from us a response. We will want to please him. We will want to obey him.

At the end of v.9, Jesus commands us to “remain in his love.” How do we do that? v. 10 continues, “If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed the Father” commands and remain in his love.”

What is his command? We find it in v 12: “My command is this: love one another as I have loved you.”

Something to note about this command, is that you cannot carry it out from a distance. nor can you carry it out in isolation. To love **one another**, there have to be “**others**” that become the focus of our love. It means being part of a Christian community. A place where we meet together, spend time together, and commit ourselves to one another.

Its in this place we call church that we can be there for those who are hurting or lonely. We can encourage those who are down. We can offer assistance to those who need help. We can share the excitement of those who are rejoicing. We can simply enjoy the closeness of love and friendship. How can we do any of this unless we are sharing our lives with each other as part of a Christian community?

Of course there is a down side to this. As in any family, if we spend lots of time with each other, there are bound to be disagreements. There’ll be times when we rub each other the wrong way. Times we even hurt each other.

Then we have an even greater opportunity to obey Jesus command to “love one another.’ We learn to forgive! The church family, like our physical family, becomes the crucible in which God refines us and makes us more like Jesus. It can be tough going at times!

Which leads us to a third area in which our relationship with Jesus is different from that of a hero.

**Being loved and loving, though it may be tough going at times, brings us great blessing!**

In v.11, Jesus says, “I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.”

The joy Jesus is talking about is more than natural earthly joy, which is based on our senses, and which can be so short lived. It is **Christ’s** joy that is in us. That joy that is born of love, and expressed through love. It is the joy that comes from complete union with Jesus. It is a joy that remains, despite adverse circumstances and negative feelings. It’s different to what we might call “happiness.” It is a deep and abiding thing, that is with us always. It is something that brings us peace, and fulfilment.

**This Remembrance Day**, as we bring to mind the sacrifice of those who gave their lives for their country and our freedom, let's remember also Christ's sacrifice for us as an expression of his great and intimate love; let's determine to respond by loving him and our fellow human beings with that same love, and so find the great joy he promises those who love him.

Let's pray.