

SERMON – ANZAC DAY 2021 – JOHN 15:9-17

Over the last few years, I have been fascinated by the significant numbers that have attended past Anzac Day Dawn services. I am not referring to the diggers that attend the services nor the relatives of diggers but I am referring to the number of people who are three or four generations removed from diggers that are not even related to diggers. There is a sense that for some that the Dawn Service has its own form of spirituality. There is also for some, a sense of wonder about what this is all about...and for some, it is about paying respects to those who laid down their lives for our country who were part of the Allied expedition that set out to capture Gallipoli. The ANZAC force landed at Gallipoli on the 25th April 1915. In this campaign, the actions of the Australian and New Zealand troops bequeathed an intangible but powerful legacy. Whilst the legacy seems intangible, to me, there is something actually tangible to it. That something is recognising the concept of a “tangible sacrifice” that was made by those who were at Gallipoli on behalf of our country. Most of those soldiers were conscripted by our government to partake in World War 1. They were ordered to potentially sacrifice their lives for our country and once the mission they were conscripted for was completed, they ended up heroes, for want of a better word, in their home country. For all involved in this war, they were “called” to be involved and they made a sacrifice for their country. Their status changed when they returned to Australia and they left a lasting legacy.

This leads me to wonder – what can we learn from the Anzacs to strengthen our faith in God? In our reading from John’s gospel:

- We find that there is a call to living with Jesus.
- We find that there is a sacrifice involved.
- We find that there is a change in status for the believer in terms of their relationship with Jesus and...
- We find that there is a legacy to pass on.

I will be looking at these four points as the base of my sermon today and I pray that through today, we can learn from the sacrificial example of the Anzacs and apply it to our walk with God.

So firstly, let us look at the call to living with Jesus.

We find this call in verses 9 and 10 of John 15. In essence, it is Jesus extending what he received from his Father to his disciples. What has he received? It is the love of God. In verse 9, we are told that the father has loved him. God loved Jesus perfectly and without blemish. This pattern of love was passed on by Jesus to his disciples. He refers to them as “you”. Please note how Jesus refers to his disciples at this point in the passage and compare it with how he refers to them later on in the passage. He then asked the disciples to remain in Jesus’ love. This is similar in pattern to how Australian troops were commanded during the Gallipoli campaign. The world was at war, our country was called to participate. Our country conscripted people to participate in order to represent our country in the First World War and remain loyal to the Allied campaign. The commonality in process is there but the scenarios of the Anzac war and living as disciples of Jesus are parallel to each other.

That call from Jesus is lifelong just as being an Anzac has ended up. Listen to what verse 10 says, *“If you keep my commands, you remain in my love.”* This is what is involved in showing that we remain in God’s love and that obedience to God’s commands is a sign of love. The parallel to this in the armed services is obedience to the commands of your commanding officer which doesn’t

show love but does show something that is important in the context of war... and that is loyalty. Any commanding officer needs to know that he can trust all that are under his command.

Similarly, Jesus' call to his disciples to show his love by keeping Jesus' commands is the call to Jesus' disciples to show him that they can be trusted by Jesus. In other words, the keeping of Jesus' commands as well as staying in Jesus' love are core qualities of being a believer in Christ and not one without the other. And even more selfless is the command in verse 12 which says, *"Love each other as I have loved you."* Jesus is addressing this to the disciples in the upper room. So not only are the disciples called to be obedient to Jesus, but they are also called to love one another as Jesus has loved them. That means we love each other Jesus' way despite the little quirks each of us has that may annoy others. We do not know if those who were called up for service in World War 1 were called to love those that they were with explicitly, but I suspect the concept of mateship that is so prevalent in Australian Society today, was born in the trenches of war.

However, is mateship love? That, however, is a question for another day or even a discussion as we leave the building today. So therefore, the Disciples of Christ are called to remain in the love of Jesus, keep the commands of Jesus and love each other as Jesus has loved his disciples.

However, there is a sacrifice involved and that is the second of my four points for today.

That concept of sacrifice is often talked about in the context of war, but is also talked about in our passage from John today in verse 13 which reads, *"Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends."* This is Jesus speaking just prior to his crucifixion. What he is describing is the greatest act of love that will ever be displayed to the world. The greatest part of this act is what is achieved in the end. In war, there is many a story about the person who runs the decoy as part of a plan so that the rest of the troop can attack the enemy from behind whilst they are distracted. It is often the person who has made the run that ends up sacrificing himself so that the mission can be fulfilled. He is the one that is portrayed as the hero in this context.

Similarly, Jesus sacrificed himself on behalf the whole of humanity so that one person would take the punishment for the world's sins instead of those who deserved to take the punishment – us sinners. He is the one who was sacrificed by God to clear the blockage that was stopping us from having a right and proper biblical relationship with God. That blockage was our sin and then Jesus rose from the dead so that the bridge to enter a right and proper biblical relationship with God was made possible. That is the effect of the sacrifice that Jesus made for us. It is long lasting and eternal and has been around for over 2000 years. Let us look at the sacrifice of the Anzacs.

It is now over 100 years old but it involved a significant number of people sacrificing themselves for our country so that Constantinople was not captured by the German and stayed free. It is the spirit of the Anzacs in this battle that we celebrate every 25th April. We thank the men and women who put their lives on the line to stop further German occupation in World War 1. These men became heroes in both Australia and New Zealand and many place this incident in New Zealand history as the time it gained its psychological independence. However, what became of the followers of Christ because of Jesus' sacrifice?

Their status has changed and this is my third of four points.

Listen to what verse 14 says, *"You are my friends if you do what I command."* This change in status, which is from you to friends, has a little complexity about it because the common part about you and friends is the keeping of Jesus' commands. However, what has happened in between the two references to the keeping of commands? The concept of sacrifice appears. This means that the

sacrifice that Jesus talks about will change the relationship the disciples have with Jesus from impersonal to personal. Jesus' great act of love will allow his disciples to have a personal relationship with him.

What a blessing that Jesus gives us here – the chance to have a personal relationship with Him. What is even better is the fact that he expands on this in verse 15 when he says, *"¹⁵ I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you."* It appears from what Jesus says here that servants are kept at arm's length because a servant does not know his master's business. Servants effectively have a role that fulfil a function in their master's business. The status of friend is vastly different and implies a more personal nature to the relationship here. This is because the concept of friend involves walking alongside each other in the toughest walks of life much like the soldiers walking in the trenches together in Gallipoli. Friends stick together through thick and thin much like in Gallipoli.

However, the comparison stops there because in the Bible we are told that: Friends love each other and friends follow examples of Jesus. But also, friends are entitled to some more privileged information. This is clear in verse 15 because it appears that Jesus has passed onto his friends everything that he has learned from his Father. This is significant because it means that he trusts the disciples with the most precious information in the world – the word of God. This has also been passed onto us.

Similarly, the history of the ANZACS has been passed down to many a generation since the initial event because many have been impacted by the heroism of those who fought at Gallipoli all those years ago. The bonds of these people last generations. One example of this occurred when I was at St. Thomas' North Sydney last century. Every year, there would be a special ANZAC service followed by a morning tea in one of the church halls which I had the honour of setting up for. The members of the 2/17 battalion would partake in the church service and a morning tea/lunch. They had been doing this for a very long time and the mateship formed because of these events have lasted a very long time.

However, what do we do with what we receive from Jesus or what are Disciples of Christ supposed to do with what Jesus has made known to them?

Pass it on.

Pass it on is implied in the concept of bearing fruit that is mentioned in verse 16 and passing on what Jesus has taught the disciples is the mission of every person who claims to be a Christian. Jesus taught the disciples everything that Father (God) taught him and now the disciples are called to pass onto others what Jesus taught them. In effect, this is the legacy that Jesus wants us to pass onto others until he returns. The beauty in the Bible is that all Jesus wants us to pass on is in it. You can also learn more about it from Bible study groups and other courses. But it is not to just pass it on.

It is also to bear fruit. What is it about bearing fruit that is significant here? It is that it is attached to Jesus. In the earlier part of the passage, the fruit is attached to the branches which is attached to the vine. The vine is Jesus who passed the message onto the disciples which are the branches and the fruit that comes from the branches are those who have received the commands of Jesus. The legacy that we have then as Christians is that if we pass on the commands of Jesus, then more people will be in relationship with Jesus first and foremost which then leaves a healthy church beyond that of people who believe in Jesus that are currently in our churches. But this is not fruit

that will rot but will be fruit that will last and make the church foundational upon the right foundation – Jesus Christ and also act Jesus’ way by loving each other.

So what can the Anzacs teach us about living the Christian life in the 21st Century? Just as the Anzacs responded to the call of the country, all believers in Christ are called to respond to the call of Christ and to stay in relationship with Christ. But this is not a stagnant staycation but one that grows. But for that relationship to grow there needs to be sacrifice. It means that the sacrifice we need to make is putting the commands of Christ over and above anything else in our lives.

The people who were involved in the battle of Gallipoli sacrificed the comforts of home to prevent a further German takeover. Our sacrifice affects our salvation and is the difference between ending up in heaven or hell. Not only is there sacrifice for the believer, if we are serious about our relationship with God, there is a change in status in our relationship with God from servant to friend because all the commands of Jesus are shared to us in God’s word. And just as the ANZAC tradition has been shared, we need to share commands of Jesus in such a way as to bear fruit – fruit that will last. Let me finish by asking some questions:

- Are we prepared to answer God’s call on our lives?
- Are we prepared to make the sacrifice to serve God over and above our own interests?
- Are we prepared to be friends with Jesus?
- Are we prepared to bear fruit for Jesus whilst staying anchored to Jesus?

What I have outlined is a successful battle plan for the foundation and growth of a healthy church. Are we all prepared to answer this call to spiritual arms from the one who created us? I hope you are. Because if you are, I am ready to go into battle with you.