

Remembering is what the church does. From the pulpit; at the font and at the table - our is the task of remembrance first. We take the memories from ancient texts and connect those texts to our present lives in order to offer hope, in our present and for our future. Our sacraments serve as memory devices: "Do this in remembrance of me" we say as we come to the table. We recall Jesus journey toward Jerusalem began at the Jordan River, with his cousin John the Baptizer.

As Christians, we value the act of remembering, and are (or should be) conscious of the fickle nature of our memories. Every story of success contains failure. Every victory, defeat. Even the 'Good News' of Jesus Christ was disastrous before it was delightful. The 'memory' of Scripture is also difficult to navigate. Our reaction to the truth contained within our Holy book depends on our circumstances. Changing culture brings different understandings. Divine truth is a complicate and challenging concept.

This morning's texts are a case in point. Two women - separated by generations - alike in their anonymity and their widowhood. Their condition is culturally significant in a way that we have trouble understanding. Without a husband, or adult male relative to support them, these women were helpless. No standing in civil law; (God's law had plenty to say, but hold that thought); no income - no prospects. The death of a partner is devastating on it's own merit, but in ancient cultures, widowhood meant the loss of all identity.

And yet God has taken notice of these two women. In the grip of drought, at the end of her resources, the widow in Zarephath meets Elijah, the man of God. It seems totally unreasonable that God would send the prophet to one who had no means to support her own household - but of course, that's the point. God's providence is much easier to see when all other options are exhausted. The grain and oil never fail, so long as the word from the Lord is heard and heeded. This is less about obedience, and more concerned (I think) with awareness.

Likewise, in Jesus' day, the widow in the temple stands out. Not because of her need, but because of her devotion. Her life has been stripped to the essentials, and she considers worship one of those - indeed, in offering "all she had to live on" her trust in God's providence seems to be

unshakable. We are tempted to call that sacrifice - a word that carries a heavy burden today - but what Jesus draws our attention to is devotion, not sacrifice.

Sacrifice is a word you expect to hear on November 11. It is the only way we know to describe the horrendous loss of life and dignity that comes when nations make war against one another. It is used to honour those who went willingly (or even those who went reluctantly) into places people should not be asked to go. Yet even on this day, devotion is a better word, to honour those who offered their lives in service to a cause.

History continues to consider whether that cause was war or peace. Memory is a fickle thing, and circumstances change the telling of our stories. We trust those who lead us to choose their causes carefully, and to work first for the common good. But humanity is fickle, and circumstances change our understanding of what constitutes a worthy cause. And the job of the faithful is to offer our remembrance into our present circumstance.

Against the noise of those who are eager that we should trust them, God's story sings a song of utter faithfulness. Against a backdrop of nationalist pride, walk Scriptural examples of those who have been emptied of pride and filled with devotion to God. Faced with war and rumours of war, we are bold to remember that we have been called children of God - siblings of the Prince of Peace.

As we mark the 100th anniversary of the Armistice - 100 years of on again, off again conflict that followed the "war to end all wars" - as we mourn the dead, and grieve with those whose lives will never again be the same - may we also remember that we have been written into God's continuing story. It is a story that contains conflict and trauma, to be sure - because it is our story too - but God's story is marked by a devotion to peace that passes understanding. Let the memory of that promise bring us safely into whatever the future holds.