

2025 TALK – REMEMBRANCE SUNDAY, JOHN 15:9-17 & ROMANS 5:1-11

THROUGH DEFEAT TO VICTORY !

Right at the end of Matthew's gospel, Jesus gives his disciples a special message. So special it's now been given a special title. These words are now called 'The Great Commission'. Jesus sends out those who follow him in the power of God's Spirit. He tells his disciples to: 'go & make disciples of all nations'. He tells them to 'baptise these people from all nations & teach them to obey everything I have commanded you'... So, what commands did Jesus leave his followers...? We know Moses left 10 commandments (& many more besides), but how many commands of Jesus do we have...? Jesus made it very simple for us. He left us just 2 commandments: love God ; love people.

Seems simple enough doesn't it? Yet, today we remember the last century, which saw two catastrophic global wars. And we now live in a new millennium, when wars continue to cause untold misery across our world... The human race of which we are a part, is still a very long way from learning & living the way of love, demonstrated by Jesus... When will we ever learn? In the words of Jesus to two of his followers: 'How slow you are to believe all that God has told you through the prophets'... Equally - how slow **we** are **today**, to believe all that God has ultimately & most wonderfully revealed to us through Jesus.

The good news of Jesus, which these two passages in John's gospel & Paul's letter to the Romans gloriously proclaim is this: in the apparent defeat of death on a cross, Jesus has won the victory for us - by being raised from the dead. And this same Jesus has promised to return to bring God's Kingdom of peace & joy to our broken & suffering world... Our suffering & conquering Saviour will come to us, as promised... Do we believe this good news? Or are we still living in fear & in darkness, not sure whether we can really believe such a strange & unlikely message?... At times, in a world such as this, this good news just seems too good to be true! Well, you know what I am going to say now don't you: Believe it! You can believe the good news!... Jesus said: 'You can trust in God, you can trust in me'... The only way to discover whether Jesus can be trusted is to put your trust in him. The Psalmist encourages us to: 'Taste & see that the LORD is good'. Today, why not ask God to help you believe?

Perhaps the story of Private John Borland will help you believe. Some of you may have already read the story, in the introduction to this John's Gospel we

gave out earlier this year, to commemorate the 80th anniversary of the end of WW2. John was a Private in the 51st Highland Division, in France in 1940, when the armies of Nazi Germany were destroying everything before it. His regiment was given the suicidal mission of stopping the German advance, before they reached Dunkirk. John was injured, separated from his own Company and ran out of ammunition. He tried to take refuge with another man in a lighthouse, but his companion was shot & killed. John somehow survived, but was taken prisoner the following day with 300 other men, none of whom he knew. He remembers feeling almost inconsolable that day. He wondered what his parents & his country would think about him surrendering... As he was marched off with a revolver at his back, a single piece of paper fluttered across his path & he picked it up. Nothing remarkable you might think. But that piece of paper changed John's life.

He felt like he was as good as dead, with no hope. He was going to spend the rest of the war as a prisoner of the Nazis. Yet this piece of paper was headed with the words: 'Good News to all Men'... And it listed some of the many promises of God, including how salvation can be found in Jesus. Not only that, there was a scribbled note, presumably from a fellow soldier: 'Don't give up'.

John believed. He took this single sheet of paper to be a message from God. That day he prayed to God & said: 'LORD, if I get home safely, I promise I will serve you'... John was better than this promise he made. Because all through the war, as a POW, John used this single piece of paper as his Bible, which he used to hold times of worship with others in the prison camp in Poland. John somehow survived the 'death march' out of that prison camp, ahead of the Russian advance. He managed to roll into a ditch to escape his guards & was picked up, thankfully by an American tank. John had lived the good news of Jesus – through defeat to victory.

After the war, John served God in churches in Scotland. He mentored young men in the Boys Brigade, in Sunday School & through coaching football. One of these young men was Alex Ferguson, who famously ended up as a manager of Man Utd in its glory days... (I won't make any rude comments at this point ...! Some of you will know I'm not a Man U fan...). Sir Alex Ferguson still warmly remembers the positive influence that John Borland had on him, as a friend of Jesus. Sir Alex has commented: 'John instilled a sense of discipline & Christian values into my life & many other boys... He always took such a passionate

interest in our formation and well-being. He was my mentor, a lifelong friend, and my hero'... Alleluia! PTL for what God did in AND through John Borland...

The gospel of John reminds us – Jesus is our life-long friend. Jesus always has a passionate interest in our formation & our well-being. Jesus had demonstrated the greatest love – by laying down his life for his friends. John 15, verse 13 is often quoted at Remembrance Sunday services. But Romans reminds us of a even larger, more wonderful truth. And it's this: God demonstrates his love for us in this – while we were still sinners (while we were still God's enemies) Jesus died for us'. This is the good news in a nutshell: 'Christ died for the ungodly'. And as Paul reminds us elsewhere: 'The Righteous One became sin for us, so that we sinners might be made righteous, like God'. Alleluia !

'Just at the right time', that piece of paper fluttered across the path of John Borland, on that awful day of defeat. And Paul tells us here in Romans 5, that, 'just at the right time, when we were powerless, Christ died for the ungodly'.

In case you are wondering what all this wonderful good news means for us, Paul leaves us in no doubt about this. There is much more to this passage, but just hear how many times Paul reminds us that this good news is for us, NOW...

Let's count the verses together shall we?:

v2 - '...we NOW stand in God's grace & boast in the hope of glory' - ONE

v9 'Since we have NOW been justified through Jesus' blood' – TWO

v11 '...we also boast in God through our LORD Jesus Christ, through whom we have NOW received reconciliation' - THREE

You get the point? Anyone who has believed in Jesus has been reconciled with God. We are NOW at peace with God. In the midst of all that's going on in our lives, in the midst of all those terrible news headlines, we can know the peace of God as a daily reality. We can know a peace that passes all understanding. All because the love of Jesus has won the ultimate victory for us – over sin, death & all the forces of evil in our world. And Jesus calls us today, to remain, to dwell in his love day by day. To know his friendship, now & every day. To rejoice each day in Jesus' love, overflowing into our hearts by Holy Spirit. PTL !

We all know the experience of defeat & failure & brokenness in so many ways. But there is one way to find peace. That's in Jesus Christ, the prince of peace,

who laid down his life for us & for all creation. As Jesus said to his disciples, even before he had been crucified: 'Peace I leave with you. My peace I give you... Do not let your hearts be troubled & do not be dismayed...' Peace be with you all. In the name of Jesus. Amen.