

# 100 Years of 11.11.11

Hebrews 9:24-28 | 11/11/2018

On the 11<sup>th</sup> hour of the 11<sup>th</sup> day of the 11<sup>th</sup> month of 1918, hostilities ceased. 11.11.11. Exactly 100 years ago. World War I had been raging four long years, leaving 9 million soldiers dead and 21 million wounded. Germany, Russia, France and Great Britain each lost around a million soldiers. The United States suffered 116,000 losses, about twice the number killed in Vietnam.

By the end of the war, Germany was running out of soldiers and supplies, and the country was facing an imminent invasion. On November 11, 1918, German leaders met with Allied leaders in a railroad car in France, and there they signed an armistice agreement — a temporary suspension of hostilities. World War I was over, and no more blood would be shed.

Then the remembrances began. One year later, November 11 was declared in many countries to be Armistice Day. It became a federal holiday in the United States in 1938, and later, in the aftermath of World War II and the Korean War, the name was changed to Veterans Day. The day is now a holiday dedicated to American veterans of all of our wars.

In Canada, the holiday is called Remembrance Day, and red poppies are sold to raise money for veterans. These flowers are symbols of World War I, tied to the poppies that began to grow after the burial of fallen soldiers in the Flanders Field cemetery in Belgium.

The poem “In Flanders Fields” by John McCrae includes the lines:

*In Flanders fields the poppies blow  
Between the crosses, row on row ...  
We are the Dead. Short days ago  
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,  
Loved and were loved, and now we lie,  
In Flanders fields.*

We have been observing this holiday for 100 years, and the fact that it falls on a Sunday gives us an opportunity to reflect on the veterans who gave their lives.

The color of the day is red, from the poppies of Flanders Fields to the blood that has been sacrificially shed. Today, we remember the significance of sacrifice.

The letter to the Hebrews speaks of Jesus as the One who came to “remove sin by the sacrifice of himself” (v. 26). He shed his own blood on the cross, once for all. Jesus was not like the high priest in the Jerusalem temple who entered “the Holy Place year after year with blood that is not his own” — that is, with the blood of a sacrificial animal (v. 25). No, Jesus offered his own blood on the cross, and his sacrifice was offered one time “to bear the sins of many” (v. 28).

The color of the day is red. The red poppies are associated with veterans. The color red reminds us of the blood of Christ on the cross. But what is the true significance of sacrifice offered by veterans and by Jesus?

When veterans make their sacrifice, they give up their own security for the security of others. They put themselves in harm’s way to protect their family members, friends and neighbors from danger. Following the example of Jesus, they show a willingness to “lay down one’s life for one’s friends” (John 15:13). But not every veteran is a fighter.

Desmond Doss was a devout Christian who refused to touch a weapon or work on the Sabbath. He enlisted in the Army during World War II because he believed in the cause, offering to be a combat medic. At first, the Army wanted nothing to do with him. “He just didn’t fit into the Army’s model of what a good soldier would be,” said a documentary filmmaker to *National Public Radio* (November 4, 2016). Members of his battalion considered him a pest. They saw him as a slacker and threw shoes at him while he prayed.

But at Okinawa in the spring of 1945, Doss and his company faced a grueling task: They had to climb a steep, jagged cliff and face thousands of heavily armed Japanese soldiers. Under heavy fire, Doss climbed the ridge and crawled from wounded soldier to wounded soldier, dragging them to safety. He was praying the whole time, “Lord, please help me get one more.”

In the end, Doss saved 75 men over a 12-hour period. The soldiers who had shamed him now praised him, and his captain described him as “one of the bravest persons alive.” President Harry Truman awarded Doss the Medal of Honor in 1945, and more than 70 years later, he was the hero of the movie *Hacksaw Ridge*. He was, and is, an example of a veteran who gave up his own security for the security of others, both on the battlefield and back at home.

When Jesus made his sacrifice, he “appeared once for all at the end of the age to remove sin by the sacrifice of himself” (v. 26). Through his death on the cross, Jesus bore “the sins of many,” and the result is that we are restored to a right relationship with God (v. 28). The sacrifice of Christ is good news for all of us who struggle with sin and guilt. But it is not immediately clear how the death of Jesus removes sin and brings us back into relationship with God. To understand how this works, we need to step back and take a look at what Jesus faced in Jerusalem, a struggle that was every bit as harrowing as the fighting at Okinawa.

Pastor Mark Sandlin points out that “one of the most significant factors that put Jesus on the cross was his actions in the Temple courtyard.” Jesus entered the courtyard during Holy Week knowing that he was entering the religious, political and economic power center for the region of Judah. He knew exactly what he was doing, fully aware that he would be seen as a threat. His words and actions were in full view of the Roman guards who were there to arrest and crucify anyone who was viewed as an opponent of Roman power.

So why did Jesus die? He died because he offended the power people and challenged the status quo. He could have remained silent, but he didn’t. Instead, he spoke up for and helped the people around him who were being stepped on, used and abused. Sandlin says that “Jesus died on a cross to show us what love looks like in action.”

We shouldn’t be surprised that Jesus did this. After all, he is the one who said to his followers, “No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” (John 15:13). Like Desmond Doss and others who have given up their own security for the security of others, Jesus showed us what love in action looks like.

What made Christ’s sacrifice *unique* was that it was “offered once to bear the sins of many” (v. 28). The “sins of many” are all things that separate people from God and from each other, unloving words or actions that drive wedges between people destroy relationships. When Jesus died on the cross, he showed true sacrificial love in action, in a way that had the power to restore broken relationships and change people forever.

The cross of Christ was a kind of 11.11.11 moment — *when Jesus died, hostilities ceased*. Christ’s “sacrificial act does away with sin,” says biblical scholar Richard Nelson. It was “an act that removed the obstacle that blocked the relationship between God and God’s people.”

The death of Jesus saves us from our sins by giving us a new path for our lives, one that challenges us to follow Christ in the way of love. When we put our faith in him and really trust him to be our Lord, we are able to love God and neighbor in a new way. Our lives are enriched by the love of Christ, instead of being corrupted by sinful separation from God and neighbor.

This path is challenging, but fortunately we don’t have to walk it alone. Hebrews tells us that Jesus “will appear a second time, not to deal with sin, but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him” (v. 28).

The life of Jesus continues long after his death and resurrection, and we can be thankful that he is always walking ahead of us, calling us to follow him into the future.

The armistice was signed at a particular point, 11.11.11. But the saving work of Christ goes on, and will continue until the end of time.

*Pastor Keith*