



Rev Alan Johnston

Let's read again this morning from our Old Testament reading:

### Deuteronomy 32

**Listen, O heavens, and I will speak; hear, O earth, the words of my mouth. Let my teaching fall like rain and my words descend like dew, like showers on new grass, like abundant rain on tender plants. I will proclaim the name of the LORD. Oh, praise the greatness of our God! He is the Rock, his works are perfect, and all his ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is he. They have acted corruptly toward him; to their shame they are no longer his children, but a warped and crooked generation. Is this the way you repay the LORD, O foolish and unwise people? Is he not your Father, your Creator, who made you and formed you? Remember the days of old; consider the generations long past. Ask your father and he will tell you, your elders, and they will explain to you.**

This is the day we remember. We remember the fallen from two world wars in the last century and in every major conflict since including what we have come to call the troubles. We remember very recent losses in battle 97 British soldiers killed to date in Iraq and even today our troops are still in mortal danger. But if truth be told what remembrance Sunday tends to focus upon is the awful losses that were suffered during the two world wars.

We read this morning that the children of Israel were to **“Remember the days of old; consider the generations long past. Ask your father and he will tell you, your elders, and they will explain to you”**.

For the children of Israel it was vital that they were told by their fathers and the elders about what God had done for them in the past. They were to tell them about God and who he was and what was expected of them. But the problem was that in this stage of their history the accounts that they would have had would have been largely oral accounts. It would have been the sort of history that they would have sat around in the evenings and chatted about. History was not something that was written down but rather it was passed on to generation from generation verbally. They would have treasured the stories and would really have known them all from a very young age.

The problem was that often some of the parents and some of the elders would have become lax in their telling of the stories and truths from the past and sometime the history wasn't passed on. Here in Deuteronomy chapter 32 they were encouraged to keep passing on their history and keep telling it to the children who in turn were to pass it on and so on. In this way their history would stay alive and it would always be known. I believe that we have a problem nowadays.

I wonder how many children know what happened at Dunkirk or the Somme? I wonder how many children nowadays know in what year either the first or second world war started. More to the point I wonder how many fathers or mothers could tell them if they asked. Many sociologists like to try to tell us that we are living in a post-modern information driven society. As society that has at its core the desire to inform and be

informed. And yet there are masses of children who do not know the first thing about either of the two world wars. How many children and young people wear poppies today but are not too sure why they wear them?

This scripture speaks to me about two things that we need to be careful of -  
That we know what to tell our children when they ask about:

- 1) The poppy we wear
- 2) The Faith we profess

First of all why do we wear a poppy? You might simply say to someone who asks you, "Well we do it to remember the fallen dead in two world wars." This is a correct answer but do you know the full story?

A writer first made the connection between the poppy and battlefield deaths during the Napoleonic wars of the early 19th century, remarking that fields that were barren before battle exploded with the blood-red flowers after the fighting ended. During the tremendous bombardments of the First World War the chalk soils became rich in lime from rubble, allowing 'popover rhoeas' to thrive. When the war ended the lime was quickly absorbed, and the poppy began to disappear again.

After John McCrae's poem In Flanders Fields was published in 1915 the poppy became a popular symbol for soldiers who died in battle. Three years later an American, Moina Michael, was working in a New York City YMCA canteen when she started wearing a poppy in memory of the millions who died on the battlefield. She wrote the poem, "We Shall Keep the Faith"

Oh! you who sleep in Flanders Fields, Sleep sweet - to rise anew!  
We caught the torch you threw And holding high, we keep the Faith  
With All who died.  
We cherish, too, the poppy red That grows on fields where valour led;  
It seems to signal to the skies That blood of heroes never dies,  
But lends a lustre to the red Of the flower that blooms above the dead  
In Flanders Fields. And now the Torch and Poppy Red  
We wear in honor of our dead.  
Fear not that ye have died for naught; We'll teach the lesson that ye wrought  
In Flanders Fields.

During a 1920 visit to the United States a French woman, Madame Guerin, learned of the custom. On her return to France she decided to use handmade poppies to raise money for the destitute children in war-torn areas of the country. In November, 1921, the first poppies were distributed in Britain.

There are few alive today who can remember the fields of Flanders. Few of us who were there to hear and see and feel what went on. We sit at home and perhaps watch documentaries about it and only imagine. I am sure our imaginings don't even scratch the surface of what it must have been like. But the same can be said about D-Day and many other massive losses that bought out freedom.

Yes we have experienced the Troubles in this land and some awful atrocities but nothing on the scale of what happened numerous times in the world wars. We remember them to today because we know that if it wasn't for them we would not be who we are today. When our children ask us – what do we tell them? We need to inform ourselves so that

when they rightly ask about the poppy and the wars and the troubles we can tell them honestly.

I believe that there will come a time when it will be politically incorrect for us to teach in school about the wars in the first half of the last century and you can be sure that the truth about the troubles will never be taught. Therefore we need to know the truth ourselves so that the oral tradition can be maintained and the truth of our history can be told.

**“Remember the days of old; consider the generations long past.  
Ask your father and he will tell you, your elders, and they will explain to you”.**

But there is a second aspect of that verse that has more to do with the heritage of our faith than it does the heritage of the poppy. What do you say when children or for that matter anyone asks you about the faith we profess? We are all too quick to call ourselves protestants nowadays and we tell people that we bring our children up as protestants but for every one who does so what do you know about what you profess?

Let me ask you a few questions this morning that you need to know the answers to because these are the issues that have shaped us to be the people we are today.  
Do you know who Calvin, Zwingli and Luther were?  
Do you know what the original Protestants were protesting against?  
Do you know who Wycliffe and Hus were?  
What role did John Knox have in shaping our faith in Ulster?

These are basic questions but questions which ultimately shape the faith we claim we profess. We cannot call ourselves protestant simply because we were born in protestant home in the same way as we cannot call ourselves doctors because we were born in a hospital. It has to be something we believe in and to be honest it has little to do with 1690. We are Protestants because we believe in the reformation and what was achieved by it and the fact that we are continually being reformed in our faith.

**“Remember the days of old; consider the generations long past.  
Ask your father and he will tell you, your elders, and they will explain to you.**

If your child asked you about what it means to be called protestant could you tell them without mentioning 1690 – if not then we need to do our homework and understand what we claim we believe and why we believe it.

**But then we are not just Protestants but we are also Presbyterians.**

Daddy what is a Presbyterian, Mummy what does it mean to be a Presbyterian?  
Can you answer the question when asked?  
Where and when was the first Irish Presbytery?  
Where do our roots lie?  
Why are we sometimes known as “Black mouths?”  
Did you know that the word '**Presbyterian**' describes the form of our Church government which emphasises the individual and corporate responsibility of members.

Ministers and members must share in the organising and running of every aspect of the Church's work. Locally this means the provision of worship and teaching along with pastoral care while the corporate work of the Church involves social action, evangelism,

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mission at home and overseas, training of ministers and working with young people and children.

**But what about the issue of Christianity?**

What does that mean if you are asked?

Why do we call ourselves Christian?

Unlike our poppy we cannot wear the badge of Christianity without the understanding and belief deep within our lives.

Being a Christian is:

*not* keeping a set of rules.

*not* being baptized in water.

*not* living a moral and ethical life.

*not* trying to do your best.

*not* just being a member of a church.

Real Christianity is a personal relationship with Jesus Christ -- not outward rituals.

1 Corinthians 1:9 NKJ **“you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.”**

Many people think they are a Christian simply because they are born into a Christian family or nation. Others think being a church member or living a moral life makes them a Christian. But a real Christian is one who has received Jesus Christ, and acknowledges Him as Lord and God.

Romans 10:9 NKJ **“that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.”**

It is not what you do, or don't do, that makes you a real Christian -- it is what you are on the inside. Only [Jesus Christ](#) can change you on the inside. Invite Him to come into your life today and He will!

**“Remember the days of old; consider the generations long past.  
Ask your father and he will tell you, your elders, and they will explain to you”.**

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That we know what to tell our children when they ask about:

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If your child were to ask you this remembrance Sunday these questions could you remember enough to answer them - and tell them the truth.

This Remembrance Sunday we have a massive amount we need to be able to remember for we are a free people – thanks be to God!