

Wendy's November Prayer Thoughts

Each year approaching November 11th I am reminded of the Revd Earnest James McKee who served in France in WW1. He signed his acceptance on the 6th June 1916 agreeing "to serve at home or abroad as a Temporary Chaplain to His Majesty's Forces with the relative rank of Captain in the Army." I am proud to have been gifted his army communion set which he used for compulsory Sunday Church Parade services, and for days when he prayed in the trenches with men about to go into battle. He was posted to the British Expeditionary Force on the Western Front. Dates of his movements were written on the fly leaf of his Bible. France 20 June 1916. Flanders 25 August 1917. Battle of Messines 7 June 1917.

Messines was a ridge in Northern France, near Armentieres. The battle was being planned from 1916. 8,000 metres of tunnels were laid under German lines. It began at 3:10 a.m. with the detonation in rapid succession of 19 high explosive mines the last 2 being untouched. The earth shook with an almighty quake. The blast was heard as far as Lille and London. 7 days fighting resulted in territorial gain and victory, but sadly 3,538 were killed and over 20,000 wounded or missing. However it paved the way for the 3rd Battle of Ypres, commonly known as Passchendaele, which lasted from 31st of July to the 6th of November. The aim was to destroy the German submarine bases on the coast. It turned out to be the bitterest battle of all for the 12 divisions. Mistakes were made on both sides.

Ypres was reclaimed marshland in the Flanders region of Belgium, so an open landscape with few buildings... The artillery had begun their offensive on the 18th of July. For 10 days 3,000 guns dispensed 4 and a half million shells against the German 4th Army. At 3.50 a.m. battle began with 2,000 Allied guns opening fire on German lines. 14 British and 2 French Divisions attacked along 15 miles of the Front. Rain began to fall in the afternoon and was incessant, resulting in the land soon becoming a mud bath. Trenches filled with water. Men, tanks, horses stuck in ground which had already been peppered, so movement was slow. The Germans had set up reams of barbed wire, and were more protected by having erected concrete pill boxes from which to fire. In 3 days the British Army suffered 27,000 casualties.

The Revd Earnest records that he was injured on the 3rd of August 1917. He would have been treated at the Front at a First Aid Post, and then moved further back from the battlefield to a Casualty Clearing Station, usually situated near a railway. It was necessary for him to go to a Base Hospital where he was identified as a "blighty" case for embarkation. On the 7th of August he found himself in the Prince of Wales Hospital, Marylebone Road, London, a former hotel, but then with 750 beds. On the 18th August he wrote a letter to the War Office noting that he was "wounded in the forehead, right hand and arm, and until this week had been confined to my bedroom." During his recovery period he was assigned for a few months with the Royal Engineers Training centre at Newark. On 16th April 1918 he was returned to France as a Chaplain to the 4th Casualty Clearing Station then in Pernois, close to Amiens. The date on which he was demobilised written in his Bible and in Army Records from GHQ Third Army, was the 4th of April 1919.

One of the comments I have read about Passchendaele was that "the name is associated with mud, blood and futility." Army Chaplains must have not only witnessed blood on the injured, but also the giving of blood to save lives.....

..... It was only in 1900 that the Austrian Karl Landsteiner discovered the various blood groups - A, B, AB and O, and showed some blood groups were incompatible. New techniques were used for blood transfusions in WWI! In 1915 Bruce Robertson at No 2 Clearing Station developed a method of transferring blood using a syringe and a tube. Richard Weir discovered that adding sodium citrate blood could be stored for 2 days, and Richard Lewisohn by adding sodium citrate blood could be prevented from clotting also for 2 days. In 1916 Francis Peyton Rous and James Turner extended storage time to 4 weeks if it were refrigerated, and citrate and glucose were added to prevent clotting. Geoffrey Keynes at 5th Clearing Station invented a portable transfusion kit which could be carried to the Front Line. O negative was instrumental in military medicine. The American Oswald Robertson at the 3rd Clearing Station introduced citrated blood in glass bottles, which he then placed in transformed ammunition boxes, packed with ice and straw, so making the 1st blood bank.

The Hebrew word *haima* in Leviticus 17:11 refers to blood as the basis for life. It carries life sustaining elements to all parts of the body, and is 7-8% of bodily weight. Jehovah explains "For the life of the flesh is in the blood and I have given it to you for making atonement for your lives on the altar; for, as life, it is the blood that makes the atonement." So God explains, under the old covenant, that blood must be shed for sins. The people were covered by the blood sacrifice offered annually by the High Priest when he entered the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement. First, he was required to atone for his own sin, and then he could plead for the people. The ritual purified them, and brought them back into relationship with God. Animals were given as a symbolic payment rather than the death of a sinner.

The rituals of the Old Testament pointed to Jesus. When John the Baptist first saw Jesus coming toward him he declared, "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." John 1:29. Jesus was prepared to sacrifice Himself to God on our behalf, fulfilling the statement He made to the 12 following the 3rd prediction of His death and resurrection "The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and give his life a ransom for many." Mark 10:45. Jesus sacrificed Himself to God to sanctify the people with His own blood Hebrews 13:12, freeing them from sin, so bringing them to God. Ephesians 2:13

I have chosen 3 texts for meditation and prayer.

Ephesians 1:7 "In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace that he lavished on us." Thank God we've been set free, and for His love for us which always overflows with grace.

Hebrews 9:14. "How much more will the blood of Christ who through the eternal Spirit, offered himself without blemish to God, purifies our conscience from dead works to the living God." Thank God for the power of the blood of Christ removing the burden of guilt from our consciences, and giving us rest.

1John 1:7 "But if we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Christ cleanses us from all sin." Thank God we are regenerated by the Spirit to live in unbroken fellowship with each other, and so be examples to all..