

Coram Deo
Soli Scriptura, Soli Deo Gloria, Soli Deo Gracia
Sermon preached at
Stouffville United Church on
the Rev. Capt. Dr. John S. Niles MSM CD

“The Valour and the Horror”

November 5, 2023

Joshua 5:13-6:5

An elderly man rear-ended a guy driving an expensive sports car. Enraged, the guy hops out and confronts the elderly man. "Look what you did to my car" he yells. "You're going to give me \$10,000 right now or I'm going to beat you to a pulp!" "Oh my" says the old man, "I don't have that kind of money. Let me call my son, he trains dolphins and he will know what to do. "Dolphins" the other driver huffs, while rolling his eyes. The old man pulls out his phone, dials his son and just as his son answered, the irate man snatches the phone away from the old man.

"So, YOU'RE a dolphin trainer, huh? Well, your old man here just rear-ended my car and I need 10 grand right now or I'm going to beat you AND your old man to a pulp."

"I'll be there in 10 minutes," says the voice calmly on the other end.

Exactly 10 minutes later a Jeep pulls up and a guy hops out and proceeds to pulverize the bully, leaving him in a heap on the side of the road.

When he finished, he walked over to his father and said.... "For the last time dad, I train Seals, Navy Seals....

We see what has continued around the world the hatred violence, war we are also reminded that justice, peace and security always come with a price.

And on this Remembrance Day we remember those who paid and pay that price; who experience the valour and the horror of war and who fought for the very freedoms that we so often take for granted. Who risked life and limb and who left the comfort of home and hearth and some of whom never returned.

We owe a great debt to those who served and serve. For as someone wrote:

IT IS THE VETERAN

It was not the preacher that gave us freedom of speech. It was the VETERAN
It was not the campus organizer that gave us the freedom of assembly. It was the VETERAN
It was not the lawyer that gave us the right to a fair trial. It was the VETERAN.
It was no the politician that gave us the right to vote. It was the VETERAN.

It is the VETERAN, who salutes the Flag,
Who serves under the Flag.

Joshua remembered. He remembered the 40 years in the desert. And he remembered that if his people were ever going return to their homeland of Israel free from slavery and tyranny they were going to have to fight for, fight to keep it.

Now Joshua was literally up against a wall – as it always is in times of war and struggle; for there is an abiding awareness that with war comes valour and horror.

I

The valour and horror of war always involve **as cause**. “*Now when Joshua was near Jericho, he looked up and saw a man standing in front of him with a drawn sword in his hand. (Joshua 5:13-14)* Joshua wanted an Israel to again be a place of safety for his people; place of security free from tyranny and slavery. His was a cause worth fighting for.

Throughout time, there have always been moments that have defined us as a people and a nation; moments, in which the cause was so great and the danger so dire that we were moved to take courage and act.

On May 10, 1940, Winston Churchill became Prime Minister. When he met his Cabinet on May 13 he told them that "I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears and sweat." He knew the cause and said, "...we shall fight on the seas and oceans, we shall fight with growing confidence and growing strength in the air, we shall defend our Island, whatever the cost may be, we shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender." He did so because there are always causes worth fighting for.

When Alexander Solzhenitzen received his Nobel Peace prize he said in his acceptance speech; “Governments love darkness because the deeds are evil.” Darkness allows us to deal in lies. “And what do you do when the lie is in the world?” He said, “Let the lie come to the world – it may even be triumphant - it may over take the world, but not through me! For one word of true outweighs the world” What is the truth? It is that there are causes worth fighting for.

II

The valour and horror of war always involve a cause worth fighting for, which demand **courage**. “*Then the LORD said to Joshua, "See, I have delivered Jericho into your hands, along with its king and its fighting men."* (Joshua 6:2)

I remember a member of my military unit tell me that “When I came back to the Afghanistan, I stayed with my parents for a 30-day leave. Mom’s rules were simple: I could come and go as I pleased, but I must let her know when I returned home each night. After one long evening with friends, I crept into the house and didn’t knock on Mom’s door. Late the next morning when I came down to breakfast, she glared at me with icy silence. ‘Look, Mom,’ I said, ‘I’m sorry I didn’t tell you I got home safely last night, but what did you do all the time I was in Afghanistan’ ‘Well,’ she replied, ‘at least then I knew where you were!’”

We remember the courage of the families who were left to wait, worry and wonder if they would ever see their loved one again; and who wept bitter tears when the worst news arrived. We do this even as our JTF2 Canadian Special Forces group are in Israel guarding our Canadian Embassy. And those among our other military in parts of Europe training and supporting the troops fighting for their countries freedom in Ukraine, and those who are on humanitarian work in different parts of the world, and service in rear-guard support here in Canada.

We pause and remember their valour and the horror today.

III

The valour and horror of war always involves a cause worth fighting, and demands courage, and finally involves **the cost**. *“Then the LORD said to Joshua, “See, I have delivered Jericho into your hands, along with its king and its fighting men. 3 March around the city once with all the armed men....” (Josh 6:2-5)*

When Joshua gave the order to do this, he didn't know what the cost would be, yet he had his orders and he knew whatever the cost it was going to be paid. For he knew it always costs, because war never truly determines who's right – only who's left.

A nurse took the tired, anxious military member to a bedside to a dying elderly man who was calling out for his son. "Your son is here," she said to the old man." She had to repeat the words several times before the patient's eyes opened. Heavily sedated because of the pain of his heart attack, he dimly saw the young uniformed soldier standing outside the oxygen tent. He reached out his hand. The soldier wrapped his toughened fingers around the old man's limp ones, squeezing a message of love and encouragement; as the old man said,

"You've come home. They said you were missing in action and wouldn't be coming home." As his strength waned, he just kept saying, Oh God, thank you he's come home."

The nurse brought a chair so that the soldier could sit beside the bed. All through the night, the young soldier sat there in the poorly lit ward, holding the old man and offering him words of love and strength. Occasionally, the nurse suggested that the serviceman move away and rest awhile. He refused.

Whenever the nurse came into the ward, the soldier was oblivious of her and of the night noises of the hospital, the clanking of the oxygen tank, the laughter of the night staff members exchanging greetings, the cries and moans of the other patients.

Now and then, she heard him say a few gentle words. The dying man said nothing, only held tightly to his son all through the night.

Along toward dawn, the old man died. The soldier released, the now lifeless man, he had been holding and went to tell the nurse. While she did what she had to do, he waited.

Finally, she returned. She started to offer words of sympathy, but the soldier interrupted her, "Who was that man? What was his name?" He asked. The nurse was startled. "He was your father," she answered.

"No, he wasn't," the soldier replied. "I've never seen him before in my life."

"Then why didn't you say something when I took you to him?" "I knew right away there had been a mistake." He said, "But", he went on, "I also knew that because I was in uniform he thought I was his son come home from war; and he needed his son. And I realized his son would never be coming home; and knowing how much he needed me, I stayed."

Why do we bother to remember? We bother, because of them. For in the end we discover that there are times when all the arms we truly need are for holding the grieving. You think about that. Amen.