

## Sermon 23 April 2023 Anzac

### John 15:9-13

On Anzac day we remember those who gave their lives in fighting for what they believed in and for our future. But we also acknowledge and give thanks for the thousands who were prepared to put their lives on the line by just going to war. That takes courage. So today we celebrate courage.

Courage has got to be one of the most vital and important qualities to be sought and strived for if we are to make any sort of impact with our lives. It takes courage to stand up for what we believe is right; it takes courage to go the extra mile, no matter how it hurts; it takes courage to step out of our comfort zone; it takes courage to be true to ourselves and to hang with the expectations of others; it takes courage to get back up on that horse after a fall, figuratively speaking.

As New Zealanders we compete and perform on the world stage in all areas of human endeavour. We do more than hold our own. We manage that through a blend of ingenuity, independence and courage, qualities which were manifested in the trenches and horrendous conditions of Gallipoli, as well as other fields of combat throughout the last one hundred years.

So we celebrate that courage and we also celebrate the sacrifice made by so many. Of course, you cannot have sacrifice without courage – they go hand in hand. And like courage, the willingness to make sacrifices lies at the heart of being a good person, a good citizen. No goals will be attained without some sacrifice, and more importantly, no relationship will be sustained without some sacrifice. Of course, the sacrifice we celebrate on Anzac Day probably goes a step further than what is required in an everyday relationship. Well, I hope so! Let me share with you a story of courage and sacrifice that took place during the Second World War.

A British troop ship with hundreds of men on board was spotted by a German U-boat and soon two torpedoes had smashed into its side and within minutes the ship began to sink. Lifeboats were immediately manned and those who were able to do so, scrambled aboard and were lowered to safety. One person who was offered a place was the Reverend Hubert Pugh, a chaplain in the RAF. However, he declined the offer and made his way to the edge of the hold. Looking down, he was appalled to see hundreds of men looking up at him, without any hope of escape, most of whom were under 20 years of age. Grabbing a coil of rope, he tied one end around his waist and, persuading an officer standing by to help, he had himself lowered into the hold to be with the doomed men. He was warned that he would never come out alive, but he replied, 'Believe me, my faith in God is far stronger than my fear of death at the moment.'

Hubert Pugh went down with the ship. For this act of self-sacrifice he was awarded posthumously the George Cross.

I don't know about you, but when I hear stories like that, I can't help but ask myself, 'Would I have the courage to do the same if I was in that position?' Hopefully, I won't find out.

So how does this relate to our everyday lives? How does the statement by Jesus in our Gospel reading, 'No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends,' fit into our everyday lives? If we take this in its literal meaning, there would be people dying on a regular basis as they expressed their great love for their friends.

Yes, there is no doubt that those who, through extreme circumstances, are called upon to make that ultimate sacrifice, are demonstrating a wonderful love for their fellow men and women, their love for the

wellbeing and security of their fellow men and women, but does this have relevance for you and I as we go about our daily lives?

Well, I think it does, and for that to be the case, we need to interpret the 'giving of one's life' as meaning to do everything within our power to do what we can for the benefit of our fellow men and women. It means to dedicate one's life to a particular cause or group of people. And the word I would give you is 'priority.' We need to make it an absolute priority to make sacrifices for the benefit of others. Let me relate a story to you.

At a famous business school in the United States some years ago, a professor delivered an extraordinary lecture on social economics to his class. He carefully placed a glass jar on his desk and then he filled the jar with stones until no more would go in. He asked his class, 'Is the jar full?'

'Yes,' they replied. The professor smiled, produced a second container with gravel and managed to shake the smaller stones into spaces between the larger stones. Again he asked, 'Is the jar full?' The students, a little warily, replied, 'Yes.' The professor produced a jug of water and filled the jar up to the brim. 'Now,' he said, 'I think we can say that the jar is full. So, what does this teach us?'

One of the students replied, 'That no matter how busy your schedule is, you can always fit something more in.' 'No,' thundered the professor. 'What it shows is that if you want to get the big stones in, you have to put them in first. And what do the big stones represent? Our priorities!'

If we are to live truly meaningful lives; if we are to carry the label of 'Christian' with pride, then we must make a priority of being prepared to make some sort of a sacrifice in order to benefit the lives of those in need.

It could also be said that in doing that we are honouring the spirit of Anzac – putting our lives on the line, figuratively speaking, for what we believe in.