



Remembering
Wesley Mimico United Church
November 10, 2013
by Paul Shepherd



Based on Romans 12:9-21 and Matthew 13:24-30

So - we've just celebrated Remembrance Day here during worship. We've prayed prayers, we've heard the Last Post and the Reveille, we had our moment of silence. We reflected on our personal past and we reflected on our collective past. Is there more to it than that?

Perhaps. Perhaps there is a lot more to it than that.

In fact, there is more to November 11 than you might think too, because November 11 is not only Remembrance day, but it is also St. Martin's day; a day set aside each year to honour St. Martin of Tours. How many people here have even heard of St. Martin? I don't think I have ever heard of St. Martin myself inside a United Church. And that's a pity because St. Martin's story ties in so well with some of the issues that we all struggle with on Remembrance day.

Martin was born in the year 316 in what is now Hungary. When he was 10, Martin became interested in the Christian Church, and went to church against his parents wishes. When he was 15, he joined the military, and was stationed with a heavy calvary unit that operated as a ceremonial unit.

Perhaps the most famous story of St. Martin is from a time that Martin was in the Roman army, and was stationed in Gaul. One day, he was approached the city gates of Amiens, he met a beggar who was cold and had very little clothing. Martin immediately took his sword and cut his military cloak in half, giving half to the beggar. That famous scene is depicted on the cover of our bulletins today.

And that very night, Martin had a dream where Jesus appeared, wearing the half-cloak that Martin had given to the beggar. And Jesus said that it was Martin who had provided the cloak to Jesus himself. In Matthew, Jesus says that whatever we do for the poorest of the world, we do for Jesus himself. This story points to that situation in real life.

Incidentally, according to some sources, the relic of St. Martin's miraculous cloak was preserved by the church. The cloak was taken care of by a priest who was called "cappellano", and eventually, all priests who served in the military were called "cappellani". From this word came the french word "chapelains" and the english word "chaplain".

Later in life, just prior to a battle against the Gauls, Martin decided that the Christian faith prohibited him from fighting and killing. Martin said, "I am a soldier of Christ. I cannot fight"¹. Martin was charged with cowardice, and he was put into jail for his refusal to fight. But Martin objected to the charge of cowardice and volunteered to go to the front of the troops unarmed to prove his bravery. The military leaders agreed. But before the battle started, peace was declared, and Martin left military service.

St. Martin therefore gets the credit for being the first – publicized – Christian conscientious war objector. And he is known for refusing to fight not because he was a coward, but because he was brave enough to stand up for his beliefs, and to stand up to the enemy unarmed.

It seems so simple – sitting in this quiet, cozy sanctuary. God commands us to not kill. And Martin did not kill. In Romans we read, "do not repay anyone evil for evil", but leave it to God to deal out vengeance. And Matthew's Jesus tells a parable where we are instructed not to attack evil ourselves, but to let God deal with evil in God's own time. And yet – it is human nature to believe that we can defeat evil. To imagine that there can be a final war. To imagine that there can be a war to end all wars. Perhaps that is true in God's time. But it is not true in our own time.

Of course, Remembrance day isn't just about philosophies and ideologies. Remembrance day is about remembering people - actual individuals that we know who - for many different reasons - decided to enlist and engage in the activity of war. Today, we think primarily of those who volunteered to join the military during World War One and World War Two, although you might think of other wars too.

I imagine that most of us here today know individuals who fought in one war or another.

1 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martin_of_Tours

People we cared about. Perhaps friends. Perhaps family. Perhaps our own spouses, or our own parents, or our own children.

And as we now are being asked to remember them - how will we remember them this year? Will we decide that a few prayers and a few minutes of silence is enough? Will it be enough to go home and look through a photo album. Will it be enough to spend time alone with our memories and perhaps with a tear or two?

Or will we decide to honour the memories of our loved one who served - and who died - by taking St. Martin seriously.

And his question - in blunt terms - is this: Do we hope, dream, live, and breath into a future where peace is achieved through violence and war, or do we hope, dream, live, and breath into a future where peace is achieved through justice for all.

We have the right to decide for ourselves. We have the right to dream of a new world. We have the right to imagine and live into the kingdom of God right here. We have the right to remember.

We will remember them.

Amen.