

Now May I speak in the name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Today, we observe Veteran's Day, a day set aside to honor all those who have served in the military. It's an interesting choice of words that, isn't it? People serve in the military. They're not employed by the military, they don't work for the military. They serve. And it's a well-chosen word, and it's a theme and a word that is at the heart of this sermon.

When I looked up "service" in my preacher's anthology, I noticed it came straight after "self-centeredness," which seemed entirely appropriate as service would appear to be the opposite of self-centeredness. It was in the self-centeredness part of the anthology that I read the story of two friends who were out camping. They woke up one morning, were having their coffee by the fire and saw that there was a grizzly bear running towards them. One of them was putting on his tennis shoes. The other one said, "Why are you doing that? You're never going to outrun a grizzly bear." He said, "I don't need to. I just need to outrun you." That is a self-centered reaction. It's a story about looking after self.

Service is about looking beyond ourselves to others. And service is about being part of something bigger than our own needs and concerns, which comes across strongly in the military with uniforms, regiments, and the fact that military personnel are representing the nation. Service also speaks of purpose. Once we recognize that our goal in life is not the maximization of our comfort and happiness, then the question arises of, "Well, what is our purpose?"

Winston Churchill, who would seem to be an excellent man to quote today, he said, "It's not enough to have lived. We should be determined to live for something." The question of what we should live for is addressed in our readings, which might not seem to have much in common, but let me make a case for the fact that they may. In our Epistle from 2 Thessalonians, St. Paul tells his

readers that they are the fruits of salvation and that he says, "For this purpose God called you." He was writing to encourage his readers to see their lives in a broader context. They were called for a purpose.

In the Old Testament reading we heard of the prophet Haggai, who was very aware of the purpose for which he was called. He came back to Jerusalem with those who'd been taken away to exile, and he came back to find the city of Jerusalem in ruins. He went to where the old temple had stood and said to those who were gathered there, "Who remembers the temple in its former glory? And look at it now." He goes on to encourage the people to rebuild the temple to its former glory. He passes on the promise of God that the latter splendor of this house will be greater than the former. Haggai made sure that the temple was rebuilt. That was his goal. That was his purpose.

And then we come to that strange reading from the Gospel. The Sadducees were a religious group who didn't believe in the resurrection or any notion of life after death. They came to Jesus with a trick question. And I realized when preparing this sermon that my wife has something in common with the Sadducees. It's nothing to do with life after death, and I'm pleased to say she has a deep and profound belief in the resurrection. It's not that. It's more that the Sadducees and my wife are very good at imagining worst case scenarios. I could be talking about something with Laura and she'll say, "Oh yes, but let's think. What's the worst case scenario?" And then she'll go on to predict some ridiculously catastrophic event, which completely takes the conversation in a different direction.

But I think that even Laura would be out done by the Sadducees, who come to Jesus with a real worst case scenario of a woman who is married to seven brothers and one by one they all die, and then she dies. And their question was, "In Heaven, whose wife will this woman be?" Personally, I think the woman would have had enough of all of that

nonsense. But anyway, that was their question, trying to trap Jesus. Now, Jesus doesn't answer the question directly because the Sadducees had missed the point. They were presuming, and this was their foundational mistake, they were presuming that resurrection life would be a lot like this life, and that was where their thinking went wrong.

Jesus makes it very clear that in the resurrection age things are different, and it's easy for us to make that mistake as well. We in the West, who live comfortable lives, can think that Heaven, the Kingdom of God, the resurrection life of about which God speaks, is simply an extension of this life, more of the same. Maybe without death, taxes and Twitter.

I've been told several times, by different people, the story of a man from La Jolla who dies and goes to Heaven, and St. Peter greets him and asks his name. He says, "John Smith." And then St. Peter says, "Mr. Smith, where are you from?" He says, "La Jolla." And St. Peter says, "Oh, I'm terribly sorry Mr. Smith, but you might be disappointed up here." Now, I know that's a joke, but underlying the joke is a belief that once we've made it to the leafy idyll, which is La Jolla, we've made it, that we've arrived. That joke doesn't work if the man was from Aleppo. The resurrection life is fundamentally different to all that we've ever experienced. The Sadducees didn't get that. They were, as Jesus said, people of this age. We are to be children of the resurrection age.

There was a brilliant but very cantankerous Baptist preacher called Carlyle Marney, who was asked to speak at a Christian college to a group of young seminarians. A Student asked him after he'd taught, "Dr. Marney, would you say a word about the resurrection of the dead?" Marney replied, "I will not discuss the resurrection with people like you. I don't discuss such things with anyone under 30. Look at you all, in the prime of life. Never have you known honest to God failure, heartburn, impotence, solid defeat, brick walls of mortality. You're extremely apt and handsome. Kids who

have never in all of your lives been 30 miles from home, or 20 minutes into the New Testament, or more than a mile and a half from a Baptist church, or within a thousand miles of any issue that mattered to a kingdom that matters. So what can you know of a world that only makes sense if Christ is raised?"

The kingdom of the resurrection gives us a vantage point from which to judge this world. It's in the coming Kingdom of God that we things of eternal value and importance. God's upside-down eternal resurrection kingdom affords us a different perspective on this life. It shows us what endures, gives us a different set of values to the values of this age. For example, it's a kingdom of peace. It's a kingdom as the prophet Isaiah foretells, "Where people will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks, nation shall not lift a sword against nation. Neither shall they learn war anymore."

And as I draw to a close, I want to read the words of a poem that's been set to a tune, which is a very famous hymn in England, which actually will have been sung in thousands of churches across England, as back there they celebrate Remembrance Sunday. It's a poem written by an ambassador to the United States in the early 20th century, who actually is credited with persuading Woodrow Wilson to end American neutrality and enter the First World War.

And he wrote this, "I vow to thee my country, all earthly things above, entire and whole and perfect, the service of my love. The love that asks no questions, the love that stands the test, that lays upon the altar, the dearest and the best. The love that never falters, the love that pays the price, the love that makes undaunted, the final sacrifice. And there's another country I've heard of long ago, most dear to them that love her, most great to them that know. We may not counter armies, we may not see her king, her fortress is a faithful heart, her pride is suffering. And soul by soul and silently, her shining bounds increase, and her ways

are ways of gentleness and all her paths are peace."

We remember in church today that there is, as the poet says, another country, God's Kingdom, the resurrection age. And if we go back to the Churchill quote I mentioned, if we're determined to live for something, let's resolve to live for this, the Kingdom of God. St. Paul says in Philippians, "Our citizenship is in Heaven." Let's live our lives investing in this other country and seek to serve the Kingdom of God. Let's invest there, and not be like the Sadducees, simply people of this age. Our purpose is not simply fulfilling our dreams. Our true purpose emerges as we align ourselves with God's Kingdom.