St James United Church



Message for November 8, 2026
Remembrance Sunday

“Conflict and Creation” - Preached by Rev. James Ravenscroft

Romans 8:18-25 and Wilfred Owens, “Anthem for Doomed Youth”

All creation eagerly waits for our redemption, groaning for us. What a profound statement! Paul is pointing to our outsized impact as a species, how our relationship with other creatures has been out of balance since the fall. It is the consequence of our first parents wanting independence from God. We are disconnected from the ground, our source, and so we no longer see soil as what we came from, as part of us, but something to conquer, to dominate, to own.

This disconnection impacted how we see each other. When God confronted our first parents, Adam blamed Eve who blamed the serpent. This blame game has happened ever since, and not just with genders, but classes, races, political and religious identities, sexualities. Everything is reduced to binaries with one half of a spectrum good, another bad. This thinking is a seedbed of conflict with the soil crying over blood spilled since Cain killed his brother and every brother after.

Soil even became a prize as we scrambled over mere metres of ground. That was the case in World War I, the cost of which Newfoundlanders and Labradorians know far too well. Of more than three hundred soldiers killed and four hundred wounded, most were shot while crossing about two hundred metres to the danger tree, halfway to the enemy line at Beaumont Hamel. Such loss for not even half a kilometre. The tragedy of lost life is captured poignantly in Owen’s “Anthem for Doomed Youth,” made more so when you remember that throughout the war, the line between sides barely moved. The land in which they were mired took a toll as well, forever scarred, large areas left uninhabitable, forests left contaminated, ground riddled with armaments.

And that’s just World War I. Now, I say this about land not to lessen the human cost in war. The loss of human life, injuries to body and mind, tragic impacts on families, communities can never be overstated. And yet, that we consider impacts on human lives as more worthy of our thought than say horses euthanized rather than be returned home, or that horses deserve more pity than birds that were culled or lost habitat, or they’re more important than contaminated rivers, points to how we like creating hierarchies, a process that makes possible the dehumanizing of whole groups, needed to make it OK to kill someone whose only difference is the uniform they wear.

Release from our disconnected divisiveness is the redemption creation yearns for us, the blood-soaked soil crying out that we let go of a sense of superiority of one group over another as well as us over the earth. When we do, we’ll remember who we are, children of God and the earth, one with one another and part of an interconnected web. As long as we keep seeing only money to be made from land, we’ll fight over mere metres of ground, ready to evict communities from where they’ve lived for generations or think nothing of displacing our animal and plant relations, all to keep up the illusion we are not just independent from God but the planet that gives us life.

Fortunately, when we return to our senses, and turn our weapons into tools of growth and care, all life will prosper. The land will rejoice, a glimpse of that promise seen in battlefields blooming with poppies. It will come as we are saved, made whole once more, and we realize that our divisions are an illusion. On this Remembrance Sunday, let us hold fast to this truth that the bible offers us: we weren’t formed from the earth to be conquerors, or soldiers, but gardeners and caregivers. When that is our remembrance, everything and everyone will thrive. Amen.