WE ARE WHAT WE REMEMBER **Deuteronomy 8:10-18**

"We are what we remember." Those are the words of Dr. Ernest T. Chapman. It might be a bit of an overstatement, but he does make a good point – in many ways we are what we remember.

I found it interesting to learn that our English word "remember" comes from two Latin words: 're' meaning back or again; and 'memor' meaning mindful. To "remember" then, is to call an event or a thing or a person back to mind again. To remember is to reassemble the details of the past. And remembering is very important.

Several years ago, I did some reading and studying in an attempt to improve my memory. I went to the public library and was actually quite surprised to see that there were so many books available on the subject. Books like: *The Memory Book; Memory – How It Works and How to Improve It; How to Improve Your Memory; How to Develop a Super-Power Memory; How to Remember Anything; Use Both Sides of Your Brain; Stop Forgetting; Memorizing Made Easy;* and those are just a few of the dozens of books on the shelves.

In those books I was told that remembering and memorizing is a learnable skill. It does take effort and it does take practice, but being able to remember better is doable. It all begins with concentration and observation – consciously focusing on whatever it is that you want to remember. As one author put it, "The art of retention is the art of attention."

Well, as it turns out, remembering is a major theme in the Bible. As you read through the Scriptures, the history of God's dealings with His people is repeated over and over and over again.

For example, the book of Deuteronomy, the fifth book of the Bible, is simply a repeating or a re-telling of Israel's history. Moses recalls how they had been slaves in Egypt, and how God had delivered them with His mighty power. You see, a new generation had grown up during the wilderness wanderings that had not witnessed any of those spectacular events firsthand. This new generation was on the verge of conquering and possessing the Promised Land. And Moses knew that before they did that, they needed to be reminded of what God had done for them in the past and reminded of what God wanted them to do in the present and the future.

The sad truth of the matter is that all too often we quickly forget about what God has done and what God wants us to do. The sad reality is that far too often we neglect our past when all along that is just what is needed to anchor us when we hit rough waters.

Now, why have I said all this? To simply drive home the point that it is important to remember. Most of us do not use our memories to their full advantage. Studies have shown that 24 hours from now you will remember only about half of what I share with you today. And 48 hours from now you will remember only half of the half that you will remember tomorrow. The greatest computer ever created is right up here in our heads, but it will not function effectively unless we program it properly. We will quickly forget important things unless we make a conscious effort to remember.

That is why, each year on the eleventh day of the eleventh month, I think it is a very good idea to observe Remembrance Day. It is a good idea to pause and to reassemble in our minds the experiences of those men and women who served our country to protect the freedoms we now enjoy. It is not intended to be just another stat holiday so we can have a day off from work or a day away from school. No. It is intended to be a day when we remember and reflect on the sacrifices that were made in the past which have made possible the freedoms we enjoy in the present. As someone has wisely said, “If we forget the past, we are doomed to repeat its mistakes in the future.”

Let me share with you just a few quick facts about Remembrance Day. The first Remembrance Day was observed in 1919 and was originally called Armistice Day marking the end of the Great War, also known as the First World War. A few years later the name was changed to Remembrance Day, and it is now a special day to remember those who served not only during the First World War but also the Second World War, the Korean War, the Afghanistan conflict and other peacekeeping missions.

Here are some statistics that I uncovered. During the First World War more than 600,000 soldiers from Canada volunteered to go overseas. These soldiers fought in a series of costly and bloody battles and by the end of the war, more than 66,000 Canadian soldiers had died and 172,000 were wounded.

During the Second World War more than one million men and women from Canada and Newfoundland served in combat in the army, air force and navy. More than 45,000 of them did not come home from those battles.

In Korea, 516 Canadian soldiers died during the conflict in the 1950s. During the fighting in Afghanistan, 158 Canadian Armed Forces members and 7 civilians lost their lives from 2001 to 2014.

One of the symbols used on Remembrance Day is the poppy. The association between the poppy and war actually dates way back to the Napoleonic wars when someone saw a field of poppies growing over the graves of fallen soldiers. But it was in 1915 that Canadian Lt.-Col. John McCrae was inspired to write the poem *In Flanders Fields* when seeing the poppies growing beside a grave of a close friend who had died in battle.

In Flanders Fields

In Flanders fields the poppies blow
Between the crosses, row on row,
That mark our place; and in the sky
The larks, still bravely singing, fly
Scarce heard amid the guns below.

We are the Dead. Short days ago
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
Loved, and were loved, and now we lie
In Flanders Fields!

Take up our quarrel with the foe:
To you, from failing hands, we throw
The torch; be yours to hold it high.
If ye break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
In Flanders fields.

And so, on Remembrance Day we remember those who sacrificed their lives to serve us, and that is a very good thing to do.

But, of course, every day we should also remember the ultimate sacrifice that was ever made for all of us – the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the Son of God who freely laid down His life on a cruel Roman cross to be the Savior of the world.

Listen to Romans 5:6-8. "You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

And every time we celebrate Communion; every time we observe the Lord's Supper, what did Jesus say we were to do? "Do this, in remembrance of Me."

Jesus knew we would all have a tendency to forget, to ignore, to take for granted all that He has done on our behalf, and so He wanted to regularly call us back to remember, for in many ways, we are what we remember.