



**Sermon Notes: Cameron Webber,**

**21 April 2024**

**“Greater Love than this”**

**Readings: John 15:9-17; Leviticus 19:15-18; 1 John 4:7-12**

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Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends.

These are familiar words; words that appear on many war memorials around the country; words which will be much read on Thursday at Anzac Services in the context of remembering those who paid the ultimate price in service of our country. And rightly so. As we will shortly say as part of our commemoration: 'We will remember them. Lest we forget.'

Greater love! I wonder if the motivation for the young lads and lasses of Kiama and the surrounding district who signed up over 100 years ago, was love?

I wonder if the brother and a sister who Bill told us about, David and Corrie Whittingham, I wonder if they did it because of 'Greater Love?'

*Earlier in the service Bill Humphreys OAM told us the story of David and Corrie Whittingham, a brother and sister from Kiama who served in World War 1. Corrie served as a nurse in various hospitals in the UK and in a number of medical units in France. Her name is on the honour roll in the memorial tower. David served in France in the 13<sup>th</sup> Battalion and was killed in action in February 1917. The bell in the memorial tower is dedicated to his memory.*

Whatever their motivation, David paid the ultimate price and the bell reminds us of that. And today (Anzac Sunday) and on Thursday (Anzac Day) we remember all those who have done likewise, we remember those who have actually laid down their lives for our country:

Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends.

But of course those words which appear on cenotaphs all around the world are words from the Bible, as we have heard read. These well-known Anzac words were originally part of Jesus' final words to his disciples just prior to his arrest and crucifixion. These are words he says immediately before he lays down his life and not only for his friends, but for his enemies! Greater love has no one than this!

Those familiar words have a resonance with the human psyche, with the human spirit, because the ideas of self-sacrifice, of laying down one's life for another, of greater love capture the imagination of our better selves, and draw us to something beyond ourselves. It's part of what gives Anzac Day a religious feel, even for the non-religious.

But when we remove these words from their original setting, from Jesus, we can be diverted from worship of the God who is Love, and dare we say, on Anzac Day, we can end up with a second rate substitute of worshipping the 'Anzac Spirit' and 'Mateship' and there is always in danger on that 'one day of the year,' of it degenerating into the worship of Alcohol and Two-up.

Jesus has something better to offer us than the Anzac quality of 'reckless valour in a good cause' as someone has put it. Jesus has something better than the 'greater love' which saw, and sees, people die on the battlefield.

There is a bigger, a better story of the greater love, of the greatest love that Jesus showed when he laid down his life, not just for his friends, but for his enemies.

We read in the Bible that, 'at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. ... God demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.' (Romans 5:6-8)

It's like an Anzac giving his life for a Turkish soldier. But why did Jesus do it, why did he die?

Jesus gave his life for those who ignored him, who rejected him, people like us, as we are all by nature, enemies of God, because of our rejection of him. It's what the Bible calls sin. It's living our own way and not God's. It's making ourselves the arbiter of right and wrong and calling the shots ourselves rather than obeying the one who is our Creator and rightful King and Ruler. Jesus died for us, to take the punishment we deserve for our rebellion.

That makes the sacrifice of Jesus stand far apart from the sacrifice of the Anzacs. Jesus showed greater love, he showed the greatest love!

And because of that we don't have to look here, there and everywhere for the fulfilment of that innate desire we have to worship something beyond ourselves. It is in Jesus, it is through Jesus that we have the Way to God. We come to God the Father through him, through Jesus who has described himself (in the previous chapter) as The Way, The Truth and The Life (John 14:6). Jesus is the way, the way to a relationship with God, to the relationship we were made to have.

Because Jesus lived the perfect life, because he died the death we should; as we turn to him in repentance, as we place our faith in him, trusting in him, relying on him and not ourselves, we are forgiven of our sin and restored to the relationship with God we were made for, knowing the joy of that now and the certainty of heaven.

Perhaps the best known verse in the Bible says, 'God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.' (John 3:16) Or in the words of today's reading, 'Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends.'

These words should drive us to a high ideal of selfless love, but they must first drive us to Jesus who embodied those words when he laid down his life for us, taking the punishment we deserve for our rejection of God so that we can have the relationship with him we were made for, now and forever, worshiping the one we are made to worship – God our Creator and King.

Just three weeks ago on Good Friday we remembered that greater love that Jesus showed. It didn't put him in line for a Victoria Cross, but saw him go to the Cross for us.

On both Anzac Day and Good Friday we remember the sacrifices that were made for our peace. On Anzac Day we remember the peace we have as nation. On Good Friday we remember the peace we can have with God as we put our trust in Jesus, in his perfect life, and in his death in our place; his death through which God offers us love and forgiveness and peace with him.

Anzac Day reminds us to look back with deep appreciation for all those who laid down their lives in war. Easter calls us to look back to the One who has died in our place and, because of his resurrection, to look forward with great expectation to the perfection of eternity with him.

Greater love has no one than this!

Amen