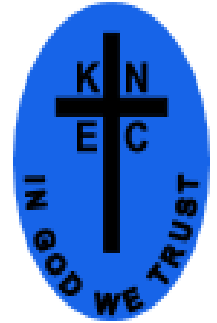




# Kirknewton and East Calder Parish Church of Scotland

Scottish Charity No. SC006973

[www.knec4jesus.org.uk](http://www.knec4jesus.org.uk)



**Reading** Mark 12 : 38 - 44

## Sermon: 8 November 2009

The text for the sermon is verse 42

*<sup>42</sup> But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins,<sup>a</sup> worth only a fraction of a penny.<sup>b 1</sup>*

Today we are here because we **remember** everyone that died in the First and Second World War. I want to focus on three stories, one from real life and two from the bible, where the characters help us to **remember** what is really important in life.

Although the face of war is not beautiful, it is often that you hear good stories from war. I have one particular that is striking.

Jurgen Moltmann was a German who grew up in a home where they read more philosophy than the bible. Then he went to war like any other and on one day his whole battalion died in a single bomb explosion. He was the only survivor and imprisoned. He sat in prison and being a thinker he came to one conclusion: "God, why not me?"

It soon became clear why his life was spared. When he was released he became one of the greatest theologians of the 19th century. He managed to minimise the influence of an atheistic movement in Germany after the war with his clear message. When bad things happen to you, do not blame God but look for the bigger picture. Do not ask yourself why me but why **not me!**

Moltmann said instead of focussing on your own sorrow, and suffering, think of and remember the suffering that Jesus endured on the cross when he cried out in despair: "My God My God have you forsaken me!". To Moltmann Jesus' suffering became the beacon of hope because He did not stay in the grave but was resurrected from the grave and ascended to heaven. We are part of a new kingdom that will last forever and ever where God reigns and not the fallible human rulers that we know. Jesus Christ is our only hope to survive any suffering, despair, struggle that we may encounter. He is the Good Shepherd who knows when you and I cry out to God.

Moltmann managed to influence the people of his day to **remember** that God still exists despite all the suffering and atrocities of the Second World War. In God's kingdom there will be everlasting peace, justice and love!

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<sup>a</sup> Greek *two lepta*

<sup>b</sup> Greek *kodrantēs*

<sup>1</sup> *The Holy Bible : New International Version*. Grand Rapids : Zondervan, 1996, c1984, S. Mk 12:42

In our Gospel reading we also hear two different stories, one of the scribes who thought they were more important than God and a woman who reminds us to **remember** that God is more important than earthly things.

Jesus taught the people not to follow the example of the scribes. The scribes thought they were more important than the rest and claimed all the honour and prestige they could get. The “most important seats in the synagogues” were on the bench facing the congregation and in front of the chest that contained the biblical scrolls. The “places of honor at banquets” were on the right and left of the host at the table. They even acted as if they were the most important people in the eyes of God. But they wore masks and everything they did was a fake show. They valued themselves instead of focussing and **remembering** God in everything they did.

In contrast to this Jesus then told his followers another story. He went and sat across the Temple treasury or offering box to watch the people who brought their offerings to the temple. The treasury was in the court of the women. It consisted of thirteen chests that were shaped like “trumpets,” into which the Jews cast their offerings.

Many people threw in coins, silver and bronze, even gold in their abundance. But there was also a widow who threw in two lepta, which was worth nothing. Widows were frequently placed alongside the orphan and the landless immigrant as representative of the poorest of the poor in the social structure of ancient Israel. The loss of a husband in ancient Israel was normally a social and economic tragedy. In a generally patriarchal culture, the death of a husband usually meant a type of cultural death as well. Although the word widow referred to a woman whose husband had died, it became a symbol/metaphor of a person living a marginal existence in extreme poverty. It might have been also true that widows wore distinctive clothes for people to recognize them

The *lepton* was the smallest coin in circulation in Palestine. Mark explains the value to his listeners most probably because of the fact that they were not familiar with the lepton as their monetary unit. Therefore he explained that two *lepta* had the same value as a *kodrantēs*, the Greek transliteration of the Latin *quadrans*, which was a coin more familiar to his readers/listeners.

I think Mark tells us that she had two coins to stress the fact that she could have decided only to throw in one but instead threw in all she had! She literally sacrifices her whole earnings to God because she remembered that God will take care of her. Even if she had nothing left, she remembered that God will help her. Her story is one of sacrifice and self giving in contrast to the attitude of the scribes or the people who merely offered from their abundance.

Jesus then said to his followers that the widow, the women with no status at all gave more in her poverty than the people in their abundance.

Jesus is telling his followers that God has a different value system. He judges us differently and always with eyes of love. The widow teaches us to **remember** that sacrifice and self giving is more important than all the wealth and money and political power of this world.

And I think this is a very important message for us too while we **remember** all the people who sacrificed their lives during the wars of this world.

Maybe their sacrifice will mean something if we learn important lessons namely that whenever humans are in charge there will be poverty, war, hopelessness, decay in contrast to the everlasting kingdom of God where there always is peace, hope, love and happiness.

Maybe their sacrifice will mean something if we do not make the same mistakes of the past

namely not to trust humans but to trust and obey the Lord God above all.

Maybe their sacrifice will mean something if we take notice of their written letters where they witness the very Mighty presence of the Lord when the bullets started flying, bombs exploded and fellow soldiers were killed.

Maybe their sacrifice will mean something if we listen when they warn us to take life seriously as a gift from God.

If we want to understand the sacrifice, the self giving of the widow in our story, we can start by listening to the testimonies of all the people who were and still are the victims of war, people who often put their lives at stake for others. Remembrance Sunday is about our sacrifice to God. Are we willing to sacrifice our lives not only for the political powers that govern us but for the sake of God's kingdom?

Are we willing to die for our faith or only for our country?

Remembrance Day is also about our priorities. It must help us focus on God who sacrificed his life so that we can live in all eternity with God. It is about recognising God's presence and calling in the midst of uncertainty, chaos, decay, war and struggle.

May we go from here and remember the words of Jesus when He once said: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God."

**Amen**

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### **In Flanders Fields**

**By**

**John McCrae**

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.

**Poppies**  
**By**  
**Don Dowling**

The poppies are red  
we wear for the dead.  
We will remember,  
every November,  
all who laid down their lives  
for children and wives,  
for freedom and peace,  
that fighting might cease.  
The poppies we wear  
remind us of where  
a red flower waves  
over dead soldiers' graves.