Lord, may I speak the words you want me to speak, may we hear the words that you want us to hear. ***Amen***

The church celebrates this early part of November as a season of remembering. Or perhaps, we might call it, a season of stories.

- We began by giving thanks for the Bible, that huge book of stories of individuals and communities, and supremely the story of God's revelation to us.
- We moved on to tales of the saints (the superheroes of the Christian faith) before remembering that we are all saints – after all that is the word St Paul used to address believers
- Last Sunday evening we held a service for All Souls and gave thanks for all those we love but see no more.
- And now, we remember the dead of over a century of war, giving thanks for their sacrifice, and remembering too, the service of people who came back from war but who were forever changed by what they had seen and done.

And for every one of these saints, and for every one of these souls and for every one of these soldiers, there is a story. And every one of these stories is not simply an entertainment, a diversion. Their stories contain truths about the world we live in. They tell us about the people around us: what we have in common and what makes us different. And the stories of saints and souls and soldiers, inspire us, encourage us, comfort us, they are stories that teach us, challenge us and have the power to change us.

That's why Jesus told stories, stories that we still tell. Jesus knew his hearers would remember those stories and share them. Those stories go on living as we retell them, seeking for the truths they contain, reapplying them to our own lives and circumstances.

So, are you sitting comfortably? Then I'll begin.

I'll begin with Job, although you will be relieved to know that I am not going to tell you the whole story. It's a tale about a wealthy man who sees his livelihood, his family, and his health destroyed, and is a really good example of a story with a message. In fictional form, it asks us big questions like, "Why do bad things happen to good people?" and "Do people only worship God because of the blessings he gives them?"

But instead of answering them directly, the story of Job puts different answers into the mouths of his companions. The story of Job can give us new ways to view the world, and the passage we have heard today may inspire and challenge us to long for God and his rule.

It's Remembrance Sunday, so I thought I would bring you some stories from my own family. In fact, stories with pictures. I'll begin with my maternal grandfather, Len Rendell. He was born in Somerset in 1891, and I share my birthday with him.

Because of his age he served in both the first and second world wars – this, I think, is a first war picture. And obviously, because I knew him as a child, he was fortunate enough to survive them both.

I never asked him to tell me his story and now I'd love to know what he did as a young man, and then as a husband and father. I've been able to find out little bits from the records of course, but the vast majority of his war time service and his later career in the post office is a story that is left untold.

In the same way, Trevor Richmond is trying to find out more about T. Stanley Beale whose name appears on the war memorial and will be read out in a moment. Despite Trevor's persistence, he can't find out about his service. Will this man's story remain untold forever?

And of course, untold war stories are increasing as time passes, and the original witnesses are no longer able to speak for themselves. It's important that we pass on their stories, of why it was important to defend democracy and oppose dictatorship, because as the Spanish philosopher George Santayana famously said, those who forget their history are condemned to repeat it. This means that all these war time stories of **service and sacrifice** don't just inspire us, but they teach us and challenge us to reflect about the world we live in today and the part we play in it.

But even though the stories of so many may not be known to us, this doesn't mean that those people didn't make a contribution. All of these people: my grandad, T Stanley Beale, are part of our history. Just because we don't know what an individual did doesn't mean they didn't do something. **A story may be untold, but it can still make a difference.**

Here is another pair of photos, showing my son Tom, who joined the army a couple of years ago and is now serving in the logistics corp. In this picture there are about fifty young men and women, all at the beginning of their military careers. Who knows what their stories will be? Maybe some of them will be great heroes, but most of them will undoubtedly be ordinary people doing their jobs as well as they can. Their stories are as yet unfinished, still unfolding: some will be told for a season and then lost, some will be told again and again. But **a story may be untold and yet still make a difference.**

And the idea of an **unfolding story** brings us back to the church in Thessalonica, one of the first Christian communities to be founded outside Jerusalem. Here is a group of people longing to know and follow the Lord Jesus, but who have

- no gospels (they are not written yet),
- no buildings,
- no hymn books or service books,
- no written creeds (they won't be written for 300 years).

They are at the very beginning of the story of the church, and Paul describes them as "beloved by the Lord, first fruits made holy by God's Spirit." The individuals who make up the Church in Thessalonica may not have gone on to become great saints whose story is told and told again in later years, but their unfolding story, mattered to the people around them, just like all the young men and women whose pictures I showed you earlier. And the influence of those first Thessalonian Christians mattered to the people who came after them, and it matters to us too. Because their story of longing to know and follow the Lord Jesus is our story too: it unfolds in us. Again, I say, a **story may be untold. But it can still make a difference.**

And that's the thing, that we carry our own stories within us. As Gareth said a few weeks ago, there are the stories of our families, our nation, our own lives, but above all there is the story of our faith, the story of God's longing for us to reach out to Him. This is the story above all that inspires us, encourages us, comforts us, with the power to teach us, challenge us and to change us.

One of the reasons that the Bible stops where it does is that the story it contains **carries on in the life of the Church**.

You are the story, I am the story, and together, we are the story. We are the unfolding story of Christ's risen body: we are the unfolding story of the love of God at work in the world.

Our stories may not be told (although with many of us documenting our lives in diaries and blogs and social media, maybe we will leave a huge heap of stories for generations to come). For sure, few of us are destined to be known as saints and have our names or paintings on walls and plaques for future generations to see and ponder over. But our stories are still important because we are important to almighty God who created us, and the things we do make a difference to the people around us.

Our stories may be untold. But they can still make a difference.

And that is why Paul told the Thessalonians, and tells us, "Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and through grace gave us eternal comfort and good hope, comfort your hearts and strengthen them in every good work and word." So that they can go on living and telling the story

May God's grace and comfort and hope, help us to tell the story of his great love in the coming week.