

**9<sup>th</sup> November, 2014.**

**Readings:     Isaiah 53: 1 – 7**  
**Matthew 8: 5 – 10, 13**

**Sermon**

Those of you who have been watching Downton Abbey over the last few weeks will be well aware that there are servants at Downton, servants who do what is asked of them by their employers and by their seniors no matter how they feel about it.

A couple of weeks ago, the comment was made by Isobel Crawley that ‘servants have feelings too’ to which the old granny, the Dowager Countess of Grantham, said: ‘Yes, but preferably only on their days off.’

At times the servants have been asked to do things and have done things which they would rather not have done but as they are the servants, they are expected to obey orders. Any hesitation on their part and Carson sends them on their way.

On the Church of Scotland website, one of the Chaplains to the Armed Forces wrote that it is no mistake that members of the Armed Forces are described as taking part in Military Service.

Service involves giving of your best in order to achieve the goals and purposes of someone else’s agenda. That doesn’t mean necessarily that you don’t agree with what is being asked of you but even if you don’t agree, you are expected to obey orders.

You are a servant of those in command over you but with commanders who serves alongside you. Together, you are servants of Queen and country. Together, you are servants who, by signing up, agree to serve the purposes of peace and justice.

Much is said in the Bible about servants. In the old Testament, the prophet, Isaiah, speaks of the suffering servant, the one who suffered to bring us peace with God. He says: **The punishment that brought us peace was on him and by his wounds we are healed.**

The Christian Church understands that to be a reference to Jesus, the one who at the most challenging moment of His life, at the moment He faced arrest and death, was able to say to God, His heavenly Father: **Your will, not mine, be done,** the words of a servant of God.

He was willing to do His best to fulfil God’s agenda, that through Him, God’s Son, the world would be at peace with God. Sacrifice was the way to

peace with God but it was costly. It cost Jesus His life but He said once: **Greater love has no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.** Jesus did that for all of us and He calls us His friends.

The people in our Armed Forces are called to a life of sacrifice. Many have made the ultimate sacrifice in that they have lost their lives. Their families too have made the ultimate sacrifice.

Listening to snippets of the programme, The People Remember, I heard one former soldier say that despite his horrific head injury, which led to him being in a coma for weeks, he managed to reverse his vehicle away from an ambush saving the lives of his friends. For that he received the Victoria Cross. As servants of Queen and country, our Armed Forces are called to a life of sacrifice.

But it's not just their lives which can be sacrificed. Our Armed Forces sacrifice their freedom and always have done, to bring about our freedom.

The Centurion in Matthew's Gospel says to Jesus: **I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, "Go," and he goes; and that one, "Come," and he comes. I say to my servant, "Do this," and he does it.'** Those in service are not free to come and go as they please. They sacrifice their freedom and obey orders.

The Chaplain says they also sacrifice domestic stability. He and his family lived in nine houses over a period of sixteen years. They do not have the freedom to put down roots while they are in service. They are at the mercy of those in command. They go where they are sent.

Something else our service personnel sacrifice is time spent with family and friends. Service personnel are often not there at the birth of a child and arrive home after Operations to find children who have changed dramatically in the months they have been away. They are not there for birthdays and anniversaries, even for funerals unless they are given compassionate leave.

But their families also make sacrifices. It's difficult and often impossible for the wives and husbands of service personnel to get long term employment because when the one in service is moved, they all move, which means children also make sacrifices. They move schools and have to make new friends. The whole family makes sacrifices so that the goals and purposes of someone else's agenda can be met.

However, to serve well, service personnel need to have faith in those who are in command of them. They need to trust their seniors and they

need to know that their seniors care about them and will do all in their power to keep them safe in the most desperate of situations.

The Centurion in Matthew's Gospel went to Jesus for help when his servant was sick. He cared about his servant and he had faith in his own Master, the one he went to for help. As Jesus said to His disciples: **I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith.**

We are called to be servants of the living God. We are called to serve without counting the cost. We are called to make sacrifices so that we can achieve the goals and purposes of God's agenda for our lives and for the lives of all His children throughout our world but with our God serving alongside us.

Today we are called to remember, to remember those who have paid the ultimate sacrifice and those who continue to make sacrifices that we might enjoy the benefits and in particular the peace and the freedom we have.

Jim Radford was a fifteen year old galley boy at the time of the Normandy Landings on D-Day. He saw the most horrific sights, sights which have never left him.

He went back to Aramanche for the first time in 1960 and he was moved to tears when he saw children building sand castles on what had been blood soaked sand strewn with bodies on 6th June, 1944.

He decided to write a song in tribute. In the song he says: There was not one man in all our crew but knew what lay in store. We knew that many would not return but we had a job to do. When he left home, he gave little thought to the dreadful sights he'd see but he came to manhood, he said, when he first saw Normandy.

Seeing children with the freedom to play, he asks that those of us who were unborn and live in liberty, remember those who made it so on the shores of Normandy.

When you go home tell them of us and say,  
for your tomorrow, we gave our today.

Last Sunday, we celebrated communion and we remembered the words of Jesus who issued another call to remembrance, a call to remember another life which was given for our freedom.

When Jesus celebrated the Last Supper with His disciples, he said: Do this in remembrance of me. For our tomorrow, He also gave His today.

An act of remembrance is a sign of the value we place on another's

life, a life that was given for us. Our time at the war memorial and our time in worship are signs of the value we place on the lives that have been given for us in battles and on the cross.

Let us remember all those who gave their tomorrow for our today.