

Major John McCrae was a Canadian poet, doctor, author, artist, and soldier. In the of midst World War I, during the Second Battle of Ypres in Belgium, he buried a dear friend. Feeling angry, frustrated, grief-stricken, and hopeless, he was overwhelmed by the violence and devastation that surrounded him. And then he noticed poppies springing up in fields where death was rampant and the earth was ripped apart by mortar shells. Those bright red flowers re-ignited hope in his heart. And so on May 3, 1915, while sitting on the back of an ambulance, he penned the words to the now famous war memorial poem "In Flanders Fields."

The first world war was supposed to have been "the war to end all wars." The scale was enormous: 65 million soldiers were sent to fight. The casualties were horrendous: 10 million dead, 20 million wounded. For the first time new technology was used: airplanes, tanks, and submarines. The most horrific experiences happened in the trenches. John McCrae described it as "time in Hades."

On the 11th day of the 11 month of 1918, the Armistice signed 6 hours before took effect at the 11th hour, and, in the words of a newspaper columnist of the time: "In a twinkling, four years of killing and massacre stopped as if God had swept His omnipotent finger across the scene of world carnage and had cried "Enough"

Well, we know that "enough war" did not last. World War II followed as well as other wars and conflicts such as the Korean War, the Gulf War, Afghanistan.... the list goes on and on.

On a Sunday like this and on November 11th each year, we remember those individuals who gave their all, who gave more than they ever thought they could—who died so that we might live in peace. By remembering their service and sacrifice, we recognize the importance of what these men and women fought to preserve. By remembering the courage of those who served their country, there is an opportunity to reflect upon what our responsibility is to work for peace they fought hard to achieve.

After the first World War, an American professor and humanitarian worked tirelessly to have the poppy recognized as a symbol of remembrance for those who had served in that war and a means to raise money to help disabled veterans and their families. Her name was Moina Michael.

Inspired by the poem "In Flanders Fields", Miss Michaels wrote a poetical response called "We Shall Keep the Faith." and committed her life to peacemaking and good works.

We Shall Keep the Faith

Oh! you who sleep in Flanders Fields,
Sleep sweet - to rise anew!
We caught the torch you threw
And holding high, we keep the Faith
With All who died.

We cherish, too, the poppy red
That grows on fields where valor led;
It seems to signal to the skies
That blood of heroes never dies,
But lends a lustre to the red
Of the flower that blooms above the dead
In Flanders Fields.

And now the Torch and Poppy Red
We wear in honor of our dead.
Fear not that ye have died for naught;
We'll teach the lesson that ye wrought
In Flanders Fields."

The Bible often speaks about war. And the Bible also speaks about how God wants us to live. Seven hundred years before Christ was born, the prophet Micah told the people of his time that it was all fine and good to have magnificent ceremonies but what was essential was to live a life in the manner that God desired each day and not just on special occasions. And then Micah tells them how to do that. Do justice. Love kindness. Walk humbly with God. Micah's words are both simple and eternal.

When November 11th passes and we take our poppies off for another year, I believe that as people of faith that we must be steadfast in our commitment to peace, justice, and freedom so that God's will be done on earth as it is in heaven. I know of no other way that we can truly thank those who gave so much.

Thanks be to God. Amen.