



Word - Remembrance Year B

The Readings

The readings for this Sunday are:

Micah 4:1-5

Psalm 46

John 15:9-17

The theme for this week: The War Diary of John Smith

All the readings are available as PowerPoint files. Micah 4:1-8 and John 15:9-17 are offered as a Lectionary Videos. John 15:9-17 is also available on The Visual Bible. Psalm 46 is offered as a Liturgical PowerPoint: "God is our refuge and strength", STF 810.

Notes for a talk

This was written by our daughter Sally Hayden (nee Bossingham) as part of a project for school. She was about 14 at the time. There are slides to accompany this.

We imagine that Private John Smith was in his late teens, if possible it would be good if this could be read by a young person of around his age. The letter from the officer should be read by an older person.

4th August 1914

Britain has just declared war on Germany. I wouldn't have thought that the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand would have brought us all the way to war. The excitement is immense no one can wait until the enlisting stations are open, which they do tomorrow morning.

I have already spoken to Jack and we are going down to enlist together. Whether we shall be stationed together or not I do not know. Some people already say that they will not enlist. They are a disgrace not only to themselves but to their families friends and ultimately to the whole of England. For who couldn't resist the opportunity to fight for King and Country. Cyril for example vows he will not go to war and his Mother is begging him to join up. She says if he does not she will be dishonoured as he will.

On the other hand many are so desperate that they tell a false age so that they can join up. Samuel has told everyone that he is joining up pretending to be 17 even though he is only 16 really.

This shows the atmosphere at present in our little village. This is the first time that most of us have been far out of the little place which has been our home all our lives let alone France.

War will be a chance for adventure, victory and maybe even a chance of romance with a French maid.

I am positive that I'll be back for Christmas. Britain are the leaders of Europe. They won't come close to beating us.

I can't pretend that I won't miss my family. I've never been away from my family home. Watch out Huns we're coming over to give you a jolly good thrashing.

15th October 1914

It's the end of training and now I know how to be a soldier, a real soldier. We are a sight that Britain can be proud of. There must have been thousands of soldiers training all excited about the same thing, wishing the same thing.

We are travelling over to France on the ferry as I write this. I feel privileged to be part of this. There is nothing you can imagine that matches the feeling of the certainty of success.

When we get there we will be taken to the battle field. The place where we will be for a short time fighting the Huns and teaching them that they shouldn't make war with us. They will regret their actions.

25th October 1914

Our first day at the battle field. We dug our trenches, our homes. On the other side there the Germans were digging as well. No one fired on the Germans many thought it would be the perfect opportunity to get an advantage on them. But our commanding officer said that they would probably kill as many of our men as we would kill of theirs so it was to both our advantages that we held fire until the battle had really started. It is hard to resist the temptation to fire.

I have not much time for writing to tell the truth and I may not write for many days in a row but from time to time I will get the opportunity.

I have heard that one man is dead already. I can't bring to mind why or how at the moment. I dare say he was being careless or disrespectful to an officer. I am going home with my life .

We have been told that we will have the means and the time to write letter to our families. I am sure my family will appreciate a letter. I told her not to worry but she does anyway. It is all part of parenting a child I guess.

27th November 1914

I cannot believe the web of lies and deceit that have been woven into this war. It is displayed as honourable clean and easily won. The terrifying truth comes out before long, but too late to escape the nightmare. Bodies, dead bodies everywhere. Men you knew, commanding officers, friends. I can only imagine that the Huns are having just as bad a time as we are having here and that is really my only comfort. No one deserves to live like this. I live with rats, the largest ever seen. Scurrying around as if it was their territory.

In fact a popular thing to do is to find a hard stick and see who can collect the most rats by killing them. Not the most pleasant activity but it does help to relieve us of the tedium. It's amazing how involved people become in this small trench game. Some people become quite cross if they don't win.

The smell is unbelievable. Never again will I complain about the burning smell in the kitchen when my mother is baking. That is nothing to this stench. The rotting bodies, rotting food, rats, the latrines all together it is enough to make you sick. Still I could not have disgraced my mother by refusing to come. Neither for a minute did I think that I wouldn't join up. Despite all this whatever men may say to save our countries and wives it is worth doing this, and living like this.

The scouter has been killed in action so Jack is going to take his place. I am worried for him. I don't want him to die he is my best friend I cannot think what I should do if I lost him. He is my comfort. He cheers me up and he cheers up a lot of the men with stories, jokes and songs.

For a multitude of the time we do nothing. Just waiting to go over the top. The scouter gives all information that he finds to the commanding officer who will decide if the time is right.

The food is not very good. Bully beef most of the time. I do declare that when I return to England I'll never want anymore Bully beef for as long as I live. We sit and smoke as we have rations of cigarettes which we are grateful for.

Hardly any alcohol apart from the occasional shot of Rum to liven our spirits. Sometimes even this does not do so. We have been blinded by the terrors for so long that now we cannot escape from them.

21st December 1914

We are near Christmas and a brand new year but we are still not home. I think that this war will go on for a lot longer than they are telling us it will. Sometimes I find myself hoping we will go over the top for something to do. I have just been on guard at the edge of the trench watching for Germans heads poking up out of their trench. But of course they are doing the same, watching out for us. One of our men was killed all because he looked over a little too far and the Germans were at him like a shot. It seems like they had been sitting there for hours just to kill that one poor foolish boy. I pray that I may never be so careless.

I have written to my family several times. The last one was never allowed to get there because of its contents. Apparently it was too explicit about the conditions. The lads and I think that they must not want people to see the real conditions we are under, else they will not join up and we need more men they say. But I think if someone has not joined up already he is unlikely to do so now especially when more and more men are dying. But this is the only way to recruit more men.

In a few minutes while I was not doing much I wrote this poem it is describing the feelings at the moment.

Waiting

We're sitting and waiting for the whistle to blow,
The whistle that's a signal for us all to go.
To climb o'er the trenches, to fight for the king,
The noise in our ears has a terrifying ring.
For each man knows that he may die,
We're trying to be brave though we want to cry.
We look to each other for comfort and strength,
But each man is the same o'er the trenches length.
And the only way that we can ever cope,
Is to think of England and keep our hope

4th January 1915

Jack has been killed in action while he was scouting I can't believe it. I have known him all my life. We have seen each other everyday for Lord knows how long. One cannot replace a best friend. I have heard that we will be going over the top soon. I must confess that I hope so I don't know how much more I can take of this.

I'm getting trench feet. It is foul, the smell is dreadful and it adds to the already revolting smell that still constantly surrounds us and now it is getting worse. I try every day to take my boots off in the hope that it will help the condition so far I have seen no signs of improvement.

I have heard that most people die on going over the top so this is my chance to do what I enlisted for. Maybe we can make it worth all the deaths and pain by winning, but I doubt whether anyone can justify all this killing.

21st January 1915

British Army Headquarters,
London.
21st January 1915

Dear Madam,

I regret to inform you that your son, Mr John Smith has been killed in action. Mr Smith was a good soldier and was always most obedient of the orders he was given.

On the 6th of January this year your son went over the top of the trenches into no mans land and was shot. It is a death that you can be proud of. He served his country honourably and should always be remembered as a man who did his duty and stood by his country

Yours Faithfully

Edward Fairfax
(The commanding officer of the late John Smith)

Last letter

John Smith
Battlefield

Dear Mother,

I have instructed that if anything should happen to me that this letter should be given to you. So as you are reading this you will know that I have been killed in action.

I am really very sorry that I have left you but I hope that Mary will take care of you as I know she will.

Thank you so very much for all you have done for me through my life. I appreciate now and know how much time you put into making sure I turned into the son that you could be proud of. I hope I have not disappointed you.

It was my own choice to go into the battle and so I do not want you to feel at all guilty for what has happened as it is a consequence of my own choices.

I have died protecting my country and you so I have died a truly honourable death and if we win the war then it will not have been wasted life. For every German I have killed is one less for the others to face in future battles. Enclosed should be all my belongings and do what you see fit with all that is mine. Give my love to my friends and the rest of the family and wish them luck for the future

Love

Your John.

Suggested Music

The world is looking for a hero, Noel & Tricia Richards SOF 1052, Full video

God is our strength and refuge, CP 443, SOF 2296, MP 188, TS 699, Full video

(Tunes: 7 7 7 5 7 7 11, Dambusters March, God is our Strength and Refuge)

IDEAS is a resource for All-Age worship produced each week from the Lectionary by Mike and Ann Bossingham. You can see more about this from the IDEAS website, www.FFCTIDEAS.org.uk

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