

## **Defence Sunday Sermon**

**November 10th 2024**

**Readings Ruth 3:1-5; 4:3-17 Psalm 127, Hebrews 9 19-28,  
Mark 12: 38-44**

In the name of God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen!

As many of you would know tomorrow is Remembrance Day.

Remembrance Day in Australia commemorates the end of World War I in 1918 and honours all who have died in wars, conflicts, and peacekeeping operations since then.

The tradition began after WWI, with November 11 initially known as Armistice Day, marking the signing of the Armistice agreement between Germany and the Allies at 11 a.m. in 1918.

The day was first observed in 1919 and became a solemn time for Australians to reflect on the war's heavy toll and to honour those who served.

In 1945, following the end of WWII, the Australian and British governments chose to broaden the significance of Armistice Day, honouring those who had died in both World Wars.

In 1946, Armistice Day was renamed Remembrance Day. Since then, the day has symbolized national gratitude and reflection for those lost in various military conflicts.

Today however is Defence Sunday which is a day set aside to remember and honour those who have and continue to serve in the Australian Defence Force.

This day has been established to recognize the vital contributions of our servicemen and women and the significant role our Anglican Church plays in ministering to them.

The Right Reverend Grant Dibden, our Anglican Bishop to the Defence Force, encourages us to acknowledge not only the Valour of those who serve but also the emotional and spiritual toll that service can have on them and their families.

Just a warning for those who have lost loved ones to suicide. I will be talking about that in this sermon.

If you need help with this, please talk to me after there is also some materials at the back of the Church from a group called Standby Support After Suicide that is run by our lovely Anglicare Social Workers.

I was reflecting on the theme of sacrifice and legacy, when my attention was drawn to Psalm 127, a passage that highlights the importance of building our lives on a foundation secured in God's presence and purpose.

This psalm speaks not only about family and community but also about deeper spiritual truths that guide our lives, particularly in the context of honouring those who have sacrificed for us.

The psalmist begins with a striking reminder:

“Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labour in vain”.

This statement resonates deeply as it begins with futility as war is, but then it pivots into something that is considerate of our homes, families, and communities.

A strong foundation is essential, and it is in God’s guidance and love that we find that stability.

The imagery here evokes thoughts of construction, emphasising that without God’s involvement, our efforts can be futile.

When I think of our veterans and service personnel, who have endured tremendous challenges and losses, I can’t stop and thinking about the support of family and community which plays a crucial role in their well-being.

There has been a Royal Commission into veterans’ suicide in Australia where people in your Adelaide Anglican Community have offered submissions and given evidence at great financial and emotional cost to them.

This Royal Commission has brought to light the urgent need for deeper connections and stronger support systems for those who have served.

It reveals that the struggles faced by veterans are not just personal; they impact families and communities as a whole.

There has been a culture in the Australian Forces that speaks to severe neglect from superior staff officers, and the promotion of a culture of bullying and harassment of soldiers who can't cope or seek help.

I personally have witnessed this when I served, and I have also seen the flow on effects which have been the loss of young men and women to suicide.

All this brings into light the necessity of building our families and communities in God's love, so that they may become places of healing, hope, and renewal.

Our veterans encounter challenges with, mental health, isolation, and battle scars.

As a church community we must strive to be safe havens where our support is abundant, understanding is deep, and love is unconditionally offered.

In the psalm there is a celebration and a blessing of children.

"Sons are indeed a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb a reward".

Children are a gift and a reward, their significance in the fabric of family life cannot be denied.

Families are not just forged with biological connections they often have a broader meaning of legacy and continuity.

I know my father considers the Vietnam Veterans he served with in 7 RAR to be part of his family.

I have been lucky to have many Army uncles over my life some of whom I thought were my biological family for many years.

We don't just honour our veterans and those who served but also their families.

The spouses, children, and loved ones who have borne the weight of that service and do so for many years after the guns have fallen silent.

These families often experience unseen burdens of military life, long absences, emotional distance from trauma, and the challenges of having to reintegrate into civilian life.

We must recognise the legacy of a veteran is not solely contained within their service but extends into the lives of their loved ones.

As we remember those who have sacrificed, we must also acknowledge the emotional toll such sacrifices take.

The legacy of love that we build within our families can be a source of strength, but it is often challenged by the unseen scars of war.

Remembering the service of our veterans is vital but so is supporting their families, offering a community that can help carry the burdens that arise.

There is a powerful analogy in the psalm.

“Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the sons of one’s youth”.

In this, children are likened to arrows, designed to make an impact in the world.

The age of enlistment into the Australian Defence Force is 16 years and 6 months.

Whilst the average age for an Australian Infantry soldier deployed into combat is between 19 – 24.

My guess is most of you would consider them to be children as well.

Our veterans are warriors who have fought for the values and freedoms we love and want to keep.

They leave a legacy that shapes not only their own lives but also the lives of future generations.

We as a Church have a role to play in the lives of Defence personnel, we are called to be the community that nurtures these “arrows.”.

Bishop Grant encourages parishes to engage with and create connections that foster understanding and support to our Defence Community.

In this we can build relationships with those in the military and their families and learn to better understand their experiences and provide meaningful assistance.

For me personally, I think we need to look at how we can be a sustainable source of encouragement and hope.

Programs are needed that specifically address the needs of veterans and their families, why can't we provide practical support as well as spiritual care?

I have witnessed social clubs like the RSL lack in support for veterans for many years, mostly concerned with Friday lunches then offering something practical and meaningful.

When I talk to the veteran community, I find there is a need for support groups, counselling services, and welcome space.

Here we have the opportunity here to embody the love of Christ in tangible ways.

The psalm ends with.

“Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them”.

This happiness is not just about having many children but about recognising the richness that comes from love, family, and community.

In the context of our veterans this is an invitation to celebrate the families they have built and the communities they have served.

Tomorrow, we honour our veterans this Remembrance Day, let us try and make a commitment to being active participants in the healing process for those who have served.

We must take to heart the findings of the Royal Commission and not only make those responsible for poor decisions accountable, we also need to work towards ensuring that our veterans are not only remembered but are supported throughout their entire lives.

This means fostering open conversations about process, mental health, supportive environments, and reaching those in need.

I can't agree more with Bishop Grant when he invites us to actively pray for the work of the Church among Defence personnel and their families.

Our prayers translate into tangible actions that demonstrate our commitment to those who have served.

The sacrifices made by our veterans are great, let us make our response to them equally as great in the way we honour them.

Let us strive to be a community that embodies the love of Christ. As we build our "houses" upon the foundation of God's love, may we become places of refuge, understanding, and support for our veterans and their families.

The act of remembrance is a call to action.



The lives given, families affected, and communities touched by sacrifice invite us to carry forward a legacy of compassion, care, and connection.

We, as the body of Christ, are called to build not just structures but communities grounded in God's unwavering love and support.

On this Defence Sunday, we honour the service our Defence community, the sacrifices of their families, and their enduring spirit.

Psalm 127 reminds us that God is our ultimate source of strength and security, grounding us to be a church that actively supports veterans and their families with healing, belonging, and compassion.

May our gratitude be more than words, reflected in support programs, communities of care, and a shared commitment to walk alongside those who have given so much.

Amen.