



It is a privilege to be asked to launch the Great Lake 5000 Poppies Project. The project imitates the project started in Melbourne, and is a community tribute of memory leading to next year's Centenary of the Anzac landing.

I have watched as our local initiative has gained community support. I have heard the stories of friends of friends who have been moved to turn their community spirit and remembrance into the form of crafted Poppies. I applaud the work of Julie Davies, Joanne Read, and Margot Bilston.

In launching this project and speaking about it, I am ignoring the wise advice chiseled into the Anzac Memorial in Hyde Park in Sydney: "Let *silent contemplation* be your offering". I speak as one who has never known war; one who is a stranger to the values and virtues of the Military; one who is now the presence of those here today who have firsthand experience of our need to remember well.

And yet like many Australians I take up the invitation to speak at what has been called our longest eulogy, our secular sacred rite, and our national story.

You may know that Anzac Day observance was very much the creation of an Anglican priest by the name of Alf Garland. Garland was a feisty character who was often in trouble with his Bishops. He was also a proponent of equality for Aboriginals at a time when there were still occurrences of Aboriginal massacres being committed. I wonder if Alf Garland were here today if he would direct us to the returned service personal who need greater support than they are receiving presently.

At the age of 53 Garland became a chaplain and served in the Middle East in WW1. When the horrifically long list of the dead became known in 1915, Garland and a group of clergy wanted to assist the 100s of thousands of people who were grieving. They also wanted the nation to face the tough question about the supposed necessity of such wanton slaughter. So Garland and his team devised the Anzac Day Ceremonies we now observe. The two minutes silence was a deliberate effort to allow all people of all faiths to pray in their own way to their own God. It was an acknowledgement of a multi-faith society. Over the years this has changed from prayer to remembrance.

And here we today in an Anglican building, people of all faiths and none, led by three devout Anglican ladies.

As a person of Christian faith I find it intriguing that the Federal Government advertising for these centenary observances describes them as “sacred”.

When historians describe the Anzac experience as a “Baptism of Fire” my eyes prick up because the phrase “baptism of fire” is a phrase borrowed from the words of Jesus in the gospels. Jesus said he felt constrained, bound tightly, until he underwent his baptism of fire for our sakes on the cross of Calvary.

When I see a war memorial that contains the words “Greater love hath no man than to lay down his life for his friends” I am taken to two places. One place I am taken to is the Memorial in Melbourne and other places where this text from John’s gospel is quoted. There is a card on your table which I hope you will keep and take home. The picture shows a beam of light which strikes the word “love” in the quote. The beam of light strikes the word “love” at the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month.

The other place I am taken to is of course John’s gospel in the Bible. The context of the quote is Jesus saying that he is giving his life for his followers that they might be redeemed. He calls his followers friends not servants. He says he has made known to His followers all that needs to be known about the Father God. So the text “Greater love hath no man than to lay down His life for His friends” is it seems to be a free borrowing

from the Christian faith. The quote refers to Jesus, but in our usage it likens the laying down of life by fellow diggers to that of Jesus who lay down of his life. It is a bold comparison.

On the other side of the card you will see one of the memorial sculptures from the memorial in Hyde Park in Sydney. It is called "Sacrifice". The young naked man has been sacrificed, and he is being carried by the grieving women of his life. The theme of sacrifice is a delicate one. We face the uncomfortable question about what the sacrifice of young lives achieves. If the sole point of Gallipoli is the making of a nation, then I wonder if we should have delayed the making of a nation and saved those thousands of young lives, and the grief of a million lives. I'm reminded of the words of the last Anzac Vet Alec Campbell who died a few years ago. He said: "For God's sake, don't glorify Gallipoli – it was a terrible fiasco, a total failure and best forgotten".

And yet we say "Lest we forget". We want to remember those who did not return. And those who were terribly injured and traumatised.

I have placed a text over the Sydney sculpture of Sacrifice containing words from St Paul: "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us. For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us." I hope that when we hear the word "Sacrifice" over the next year or so, we will remember the meaningful sacrifice made by Jesus for our redemption.

So friends a warm welcome to today's gathering. Thank you for your presence and interest, and the respect it indicates. And well done with all the hand craft. May the 5000 Poppies Project continue to grow. I now formally launch the project, and ask you to show your appreciation to those who are our leaders. Rev'd Les Forester 2014