

Remembering Well
***A Reflection on The Wreckage* by Michael Crummey**
Preached by The Rev. Robert Oliphant
at Eglinton St. George's United Church
November 12, 2006

Genesis 22: 1 - 19

I think the children in my neighbourhood on Florwin Drive in Sault Ste Marie knew that I was going to be a minister long before I did. Since it was always a day off from school for us we had a ritual practice every year for Remembrance Day. We felt it was important to have an observance of Remembrance Day held in my family home, in our basement recreation room. Each year, I was selected to be the minister. We took part very seriously in a series of rituals including scripture readings, a hymn that we sang and we always recited *In Flanders' Fields* by John McCrae, which we had already memorized at school. We took it all very seriously as we held this momentous event for our neighbourhood.

All the mothers, mostly not working outside the home in those days, came to our service. The only crisis came the year Mrs. Farrell arrived in her rollers. We felt she was not taking us nearly seriously enough. She excused herself and the next year, of course, did not commit that sin again. I remember in those days that it was a fairly simple message that we offered to each other. Of course, in those days, the war was not nearly as long ago as it is now and we all had fathers who had been involved in the service. We each had a sense of the dignity for those who had offered their lives. The message of remembrance seemed simple in such a time of peace: we remembered those who had died; we gave thanks for those who had offered themselves, putting their lives in harm's way; and we allowed ourselves to take all time needed to do just that.

In 2006, I find myself much more conflicted about Remembrance Day observances. The simple message of those earlier years and that age are not nearly as satisfying for me in today's complex world. It seems that, as we take greater time to honour the veterans each year, there is an increasing tendency to glorify war. At times, the suffering of those who have been through war seems to be being co-opted, used to promote a remilitarization of Canada. I have an increasing suspicion that there is a movement to glorify the past such that we will then provide arms enough to continue towards becoming a national war-machine.

At the same time I hold these thoughts, I know very well of the freedom that was fought for and that people gave their lives for. I have, as a minister of the congregation, a