

Dr Karen Ewing's Remembrance Day Speech

(Editor's Note: Last month there were an unusual number of Remembrance Day photos of laying wreaths at area services, we ran out of room, but were aware Dr Ewing's speech at the November 11th service at Veteran's Memorial Park, would be current a month later. We are pleased to present the speech here).

Serving members, Veterans, Silver cross parents, families of the Fallen, honoured guests, ladies and gentlemen. WELCOME to the Veterans Memorial Park Remembrance Day 2022.

Much has occurred in our world since last we met, in this park. In just this last year, after 77 years of relative peace, war rages again in Europe as Russia continues its illegal, unjustifiable bombardment and war crimes against the Ukrainian people. With countries choosing sides, this conflict has become a world war in everything but name.

Liberal Democracies and institutions continue their decline. We, in our nearly post COVID world, suffer debilitating inflation. The Mass Casualty Commission ended without any discernible hope of delivering answers or the support our people require, as blood continues to spill from Portauquipe.

Two months ago cyclone FIONA destroyed homes and livelihoods and devastated Nova Scotia's forests, and of course the death of our Commander and Chief, Our Sovereign Lady Queen Elizabeth II.

The dark, it seems, is on its way.

Scholars and Historians alike warn that if Putin is allowed to win the war in Ukraine, he will continue his conquests. Xi Ping will invade Taiwan, and 2022 will be remembered not only as the year when much of the world descended once again into war, but the year when another dark age began.

Many more millions will fall into poverty. Civil rights, women's rights, minority rights... human rights already in decline... will continue to fail. Social safety nets will disappear and global ef-

forts to feed the hungry, the prevention of disease thru clean water, and global vaccination programs will decline. Climate change mitigation will fall away.

We fail to remember at our peril that it was the relative calm and reduction of defence budgets over the past 70 years that allowed the progress in health, education and the judicial system that exists today. Instead, countries and their people will, once again, turn inward and their labour used to finance

weapons, including nuclear weapons; weapons of Mutually Assured Destruction.

The dark is surely on its way. We know, don't we, in our hearts, the dark is already here.

Anne Frank described it as "an approaching thunder, that threatened to overtake us all." And so it did. So what are we to do? I know you are tired. I am tired too. But every generation is called. And this is our time. And we know what's at stake.

If we do not have the courage to fight, then we must find it. Courage is the soldier racing into the fire. Courage is that and more. Courage, from the French coeur or heart, demands conscience and taking responsibility for our actions and our inaction concerning our lives and the lives of others.

In war there is no guarantee of success; there is, in fact, as many families here have come to know, no guarantee of survival. The courageous sacrifice body and mind for the cause they have undertaken. But courage cannot be kept down by mortars or missiles or gas, by torture or bullets beside a ravine.

Martin Luther King, days before his assassination said, "There is something in the universe that justified Carlyle to say, 'No lie can live forever', and something in the universe that justified William Bryant to say, 'Truth crushed into the earth shall rise again.'

In the first books of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, Abel's blood, crushed into the earth, calls out from the ground. So too then from the forests of Armenia,

the trenches of the Somme and Vimy Ridge, the ravines of Babyn-Yar, the beaches of Dieppe and Juno, the fields of Cambodia, roadsides of Rwanda, the grounds of residential schools, and the mass graves of Mariupol.

Truths, crushed into the earth, will not stay buried. On days like this, when we are gathered to remember, the ghosts of Vimy draw near; the ancient armies of Ezekiel and Dunbarrow in bone and sinew rise. The dead are piled up and the starving stare at us over a thousand years.

These are powerful metaphors. But they are metaphors. We know the truth does not rise from the ground, blood does not speak to us from the earth, we cannot wait for ancient armies of sinew and bone to rise and join our soldiers on the battlefield.

This is our time.

It is only when enough of us who still call ourselves human find our hearts, rediscover our courage, and hear and see and recognize the truth, that change will occur. When enough of us stand up and say what happened in Rwanda, and in Babyn Yar was wrong. What happened in Kamloops was wrong. What is happening in the US and in Iran regarding women's rights is wrong. What is happening in the Ukraine is wrong: forced deportations, attacks on civilians, and more mass graves discovered every day ... with barely a ripple in humanity.

Only when enough of us with courage and heart feel the pain of others as if it were our own; when enough of us have our conscience awakened and our moral capacity tested, will we decide if we are better than this. Only then will we acknowledge our agency and act, to save our own lives, and in so doing save the lives of others. That is how the truth rises. That is how the blood speaks from the ground. We are the rising truth. Our actions are the army of bones joining our soldiers on the battlefield.

We civilians on this continent have so far been spared the deep look into the abyss endured at Passchendaele and Beaumont-Hamel, Dieppe and Juno, Rwanda, Cambodia and Kandahar. But there is no guarantee that we will continue to be spared. No guarantee we will succeed.

I know you are tired, but are we not, most of us, still yearning for glimpses of humanity, searching in some way large or small for purpose? What greater purpose than to fight against the darkness, the thunder that threatens to overtake us all? To protect and defend the lives that peace has afforded us.

The peace for which the soldiers here remembered sacri-



Dr Karen Ewing just prior to her delivery of her speech at Remembrance Day ceremonies at Veteran's Memorial Park, Bass River. (Contributed)

ficed body and mind. Every generation is called. When we can see our lives not as a privilege but as an opportunity full of choices, every choice moving us all closer to, or further from peace, then will we begin to see the dawn. Then will we begin to reverse the thunder.

In The New Testament Christian Bible, Paul tells us to, "Work out your salvation now . . . or later, in fear and trembling." The truly courageous among us are not just imagining, not just hoping for, waiting for, whatever dispensation will arrive. The courageous seek the truth, measure with their conscience, choose and act.

The dark is here but in moments like this, here in this place, surrounded by heroes, by courage, valour, and sacrifice, no matter the attitude of the body, the human soul is on its knees. The dead are piled up, the lonely and fearful from Kamloops, the doomed children of Theresienstadt, the starving of

Leningrad, the terrified of Ypres, and the defiant fighters of Mariupol stare ... and ask us what we will do.

The dark is here, the silence is immense, but the truth, like the sun, will rise ... through us. Peace is a choice and the work of every generation. And this is our time. We could do so much.

We must use our voices to speak or shout, our intellect to write, to organize, our feet to march, our hands to build, our conscience to vote and, if necessary, we will be called to use our blood and bone. In the darkness let us listen for the truth, rising with the dawn. A dawn the soldiers remembered on these

stones will not see, but with their lives once promised.

It can not happen without us, and it could not have happened without them.

Lest we forget.

Karen Ewing MD CCFP-FCFP Chair
VMP

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Wishing you and yours a happy, healthy and safe holiday season!

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