

- Have you been busy raking leaves? *Why* do leaves fall?
 - Leaves can only make food when they have enough sunlight...
 - Most deciduous leaves cannot survive freezing temperatures...
 - Trees lose water through their leaves. If deciduous trees kept their leaves when the ground froze, they would continue losing water...
 - Many leaves are damaged by leaf-eating insects, eggs and larvae...
 - Basically, the leaf has become useless + a liability = “*the weakest link*”!
 - So the tree protects itself from the leaf, which it abandons to the winds!
- Connection with Remembrance Sunday?
 - Soldiers don’t know when they will be called on to fight. They wait for orders, but they don’t know what will happen to them once the battle starts.
 - Jesus knows what is about to happen to him (arrest, trial, death, resurrection, ascension). He impresses on his disciples their need to remain in fellowship with him and be true to him... He speaks of the vine and branches; I have spoken of a tree and its leaves. The point is, Jesus – the vine or the tree – does not cast off his branches or leaves! He never throws them away. But do they abandon him?

According to Jesus, the essence of fellowship with him is love John 15:9-10 ⁹*I have loved you even as the Father has loved me. Remain in my love.* ¹⁰*When you obey my commandments, you remain in my love, just as I obey my Father’s commandments and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.*

- So, it’s a love for us that is as strong as God the Father’s love for Jesus.
- – a love that proves itself in two ways – overflowing joy and by obedience. And the primary proof of obedience is love for one another (12, 13). It is easy to *say* we love God, but we

show it by the joy we find in loving God's people! And it is easy to *say* we love others, but we need to show it.

I want to look a little further at fallen leaves.

1 – Fallen Leaves

- Today we honour those who laid down their lives for this country...
 - Untold numbers in two World Wars and conflicts since – incl Iraq and Afghanistan
 - Fallen leaves – not shed *by* their nation, but “*laid down their lives for their friends*”!
- Today, we honour their memory. We recall their sacrifice. We thank God for deliverance gained at such a price.
- A soldier may go to war in quest of adventure or out of high principles and ideals; but when he fights to the death it is for his mates/friends. He will do anything for them. They are a team. (And an Army must work as a team!)
- But we also remember those who came back from war with physical or mental injuries. Families who suffered loss or who struggle with the aftermath of injury and recovery. All of them can, at times, feel like they have been abandoned.

2 – The First Leaf

- Jesus is not just the tree – he is also a leaf that fell. When Jesus speaks of the love that lays down its life, he is not committing us to a path he has not himself trodden. (What a lesson in leadership!) Romans 5:10 *I mean that while we were God's enemies, he made friends with us through his Son's death.*
 - Where in all the world do we see greater love than the love of the Lord Jesus, who laid down his life for those – once his enemies – whom he names his friends?
-
- He left the comfort and glory of his Father's right hand, to come to a world of darkness, suffering, sin and death – to bear the taunts and rejection of men and women who questioned his motives and challenged his authority. And why? To open up the only way by

which sinners such as you and I might be restored to life and to peace with God!

- I ask you today, in considering the challenge of the Lord's words and actions, have you taken a long, hard look at what Jesus did in suffering, dying and rising again to rescue us from a fate far worse than death?
- Have you knelt before his Cross and cried out, "Lord Jesus, considering your great love for me, and my death you took for me, I take you as my Saviour and my Lord; I ask you into my heart. Wash me clean; save me; make me new; and keep me for all eternity!" Call upon him now: for now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation! Verse 13...

3 – A Leaf out of His Book

- I see from these readings that Jesus bids you and me follow the example he has set,
 - To mirror his great love!
 - To lay life itself upon the altar, and if needs be to yield it up!
- Not only those who have served in war, but each of us is called daily to follow the example of Jesus.
- How can we measure up to this calling?
- Not by the strength of our own inner resources, but by the power of his life within us!
- Therefore, abide in him! (He does not shed his leaves; but have *we* left him?)
- The Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ is the very power of God! He does not call us to go where he himself has not gone, nor where he will not go with us. The call may be daunting, but he will give you strength; only ask and see for yourself that the Lord is rich and abundant in his kindness to all who put their trust in him!
- Some have been called on to die for their friends. The rest of us have been called to live for ours. There is still a commitment. There is still a cost. There is also a promised strength (v10)...

Conclusion

- We have all been called to love and to serve, if need be, to lay down our lives... May God help us to serve wholeheartedly and unreservedly! And to know the dignity of true service!
- The fallen leaf perishes; but those who serve in the name of Christ will never perish: for he gave his life that we might live with him forever. What a price! What a victory!