

## Remembrance Sunday 2020

This time of the year is all about remembering. We have had, in the last eleven days, All Saints and All Souls. We have also remembered, remembered the fifth of November, when the course of British history could have been changed dramatically, and, of course, today, Remembrance Sunday, when we remember all those men and women who have given their lives in the service of their country. In the Judaeo/Christian tradition remembering is always very important. During his last meal with his disciples, a Passover meal, Jesus would have remembered, together with all those who were gathered with him, the flight from Egypt, the release from slavery, the crossing of the Red Sea and the eventual settling in the land which they believed God had given to them, as he called them together to make a special nation - Israel. We call it the Exodus.

Following his death and resurrection, Jesus' early followers would have given great significance to the actual places where Passion, death and resurrection took place, and they would have remembered where those places were. The Emperor Hadrian, no friend of Christians, tried to obliterate those

memories by building pagan temples on the sites. The opposite happened. Saint Helena, mother of the first Christian Emperor Constantine, went looking for the sites, and the temples helped her to find them.

Even today, in troubled middle-east times - at the place where it has been believed for two thousand years that the body of Jesus was buried after his crucifixion, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, Holy Communion is celebrated every day, to remember not only the death of Jesus, but the resurrection of Christ.

So, on this Remembrance Sunday, what is it that we remember? I remember my Uncle Tom, Major Thomas Richards, who died peacefully in his bed after long years of military service. Deafened when he flung himself on top of a young private to shield him from a grenade in Korea, mentioned in dispatches, recipient of several medals (don't ask me), so proud of his military service. And I remember my father, conscripted during WW2, an RAF mechanic (leading aircraftsman) who served in Aden; he never mentioned the war - too terrible to talk about - too many friends lost. Wouldn't go to Remembrance Day services or parades - 'I don't want to

remember, I want to forget'. You will all have your own memories. So, there is remembering and there is remembering...

Today we remember those who have given their lives for our freedom, particularly in what we call the great war - those who supported war wholeheartedly, those who went grudgingly, those who went because they didn't know what else to do, how to get out of it. And I would like to add those at home whose lives were lost - those who died in their own homes, fire watchers and fire fighters, those who died trying to keep damage to a limit, to help those in need, those who cleared buildings or made cups of tea; they are all surely worthy of our thanksgiving. It was almost over when I was born - I just grew up in a damaged house and saw the rubble in Coventry where I went to college. But many of you will remember.

In the Church of the Holy Sepulchre every day the ultimate Remembrance takes place; the Remembrance of the one who died and rose again so that we could be freed from the fear of sin and death. And it is within that context that today we remember those who have died in war and walk with those who grieve for them - and with those who will grieve next week and

next year as we still try to settle our differences through force.

In the Jewish and Christian traditions remembering means to go back to the past in time and space to where events took place, to bring those events into the present, so that they can change our current reality in order that the future can be transformed.

As we remember now the sacrifice of Jesus, let us pray that into our war torn world we will be able to bring something of his peace, his hope - blessed are the poor in spirit, those who put their trust in God - and blessed are the peacemakers - and how much we need them today.

There are times when the world falls apart. Think of the people of Syria whose war was never seems to get any closer to an end, think of people in California caught up in wild fires, think of people whose lives have been shattered in the past weeks by terrorist attacks. Disaster overtakes them. Everything seems to be lost. 'How can this happen?' they ask. Does God exist, and if He does, does He care?

People make sense of suffering in different ways. For some, it is all locked up inside, and never shared. Others need to talk;

some need to write it all down - letters, diaries, poems. Robert Palmer, who died in action in WW1, wrote

'How long, O lord, how long, before the flood  
Of crimson welling carnage shall abate?  
From sodden plain in West and East the blood  
Of kindly men streams up in mists of hate.'

Today we try to set the events of life and death within the larger context of God's purpose - especially when it seems like the world is ending. Many words will be spoken today; if they are to ring true, and have any meaning, they must address God who is 'God not of the dead, but of the living'.

Paul makes it quite clear, as he writes to the church in Corinth, that this belief is fundamental to the Christian faith: 'if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile - in vain - if for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied'.

On this Remembrance Sunday we take time to remember the suffering and sacrifice of the people for whom Jesus' prophetic words 'Nation will rise against nation' have a

particular resonance. War is always an end of the world as we know it, in some sense - even if a new - and maybe better - world comes out of it.

Today we collectively acknowledge the endurance of those who went through this experience, or indeed, are still going through it, as our troops are still sent to conflict zones. We give them space, where appropriate, to put their experiences into words, and we remember the stories they told, and the ones they never told. Where words fail us, we use the power of silence to remember and to pray. And perhaps, most importantly, we struggle in prayer with them to place their experience within the wider context of God's purpose, and in doing this try to make sense of what they went through, or still go through today. My prayer is that one day we will learn that killing each other isn't the way to sort out our differences.

## Remembrance Day Prayers

Let us pray for all who suffer as a result of conflict, and ask that God give us peace: for the Service men and women who have died in the violence of war, each one remembered by and known to God.

For those who love them in death as in life, offering the distress of our grief and the sadness of our loss.

For all members of the Armed Forces who are in danger this day, remembering family, friends and all who pray for their safe return.

For civilian women, children and men whose lives are disfigured by war or terror, calling to mind in penitence the anger and hatreds of humanity.

For peace makers and peacekeepers, who seek to keep this world secure and free;

For all who bear the burden and privilege of leadership – political, military and religious; asking for gifts of wisdom and resolve in the search for reconciliation and peace.

O God of truth and justice, we hold before you those whose memory we cherish and those whose names we will never know. Help us to lift our eyes above the torment of this broken world, and grant us the grace to pray for those who wish us harm. As we honour the past, may we put our faith in your future; for you are the source of life and hope, now and for ever. Amen.