

Talk for Remembrance Sunday, 2020

Here we are at Remembrance Sunday again. 2020 is a momentous year not least because of this dreadful pandemic which has turned everybody's life upside down in some way or other. It is also the 102nd anniversary of the Armistice that ended the hostilities of the First World War, but perhaps more importantly it is the 75th Anniversary of the end of the 2nd World War, the last 'milestone' year that many alive at the time will experience. Sadly we have not been able to remember that Peace seventy-five years ago with the celebrations and parties we would normally have expected. Ironically, the world is at war again, but this time against an invisible enemy, COVID-19. As during the world wars, people pulled together and showed community spirit in this nation, we have seen great signs of that in the present crisis with the Health Service working flat out and volunteers helping the vulnerable and poor. People's generosity has shown through with contributions to food banks and other initiatives such as the St Thomas Larder run by the local churches.

Today's Gospel seems rather unlikely as one for Remembrance; the story of the wise and unwise bridesmaids. It is a story about readiness; it's about being ready for death, ready for that day when we move on from our earthly bodies into the eternal life that Jesus promised us. Will we be prepared to meet with him? I hope we will. All those young men who died in the world wars and indeed in all the conflicts since WW2 were not ready to die. They went to fight, not to die. Many of them were young men with dreams, with their lives before them and they fully intended coming home again.

Lord Grey, the Foreign Secretary in 1914, when the outbreak of WW1 was imminent, said the famous words; "The lamps are going out all over Europe, we shall not see them lit again in our life-time". The lamps of those young men had gone out as they had for the unprepared bridesmaids and they were not seen again.

Sadly the war to end all wars did no such thing. The solution to war is not war; war does not create peace as such, not real peace. St Paul exhorts the Ephesians to act "with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." True Peace is created by love, by tolerance, by forbearance, by forgiveness, by the qualities St Paul commends to us. But that does not mean that we should not remember those who have died fighting in wars and be thankful for what they did. Sadly there are times when war is inevitable; there is no doubt that had Hitler been allowed to run riot through Europe without opposition, the consequences would have been even more horrendous than they were.

In the Thessalonians reading, St Paul speaks of not wanting the brothers and sisters to be uninformed about those who have died because they may not grieve as others do who have no hope. That is the hope that Jesus won for us through his death and resurrection. We remember those who have died in war and pray that they may have died in that same hope, the hope that Jesus offers to us all, that we should all rise on the last day to be with the Lord. Because of that hope grief takes a back seat.

When we remember those who lost their lives in the various wars of the 20th Century, and it is very important that we do, we need to be firm in our quest to maintain peace

at all costs. The futility of the carnage of those wars and the destruction of people's lives and livelihoods is starkly highlighted when we see how easily a virus such as this can devastate our lives and way of life. War is avoidable if only humankind act towards each other with respect and love. Jesus gives us his peace. That is the peace we must spread through the world. We must also fight this pandemic with respect for the health and lives of others. The world needs to unite against it. Hopefully, the differences that cause hostilities between peoples can be forgotten when we unite to fight the common enemy of all. As Christians we go forward in the peace of Christ, with hope in our hearts, ready for whatever comes.

Amen.