

Sermon Remembrance Sunday 2014

Remembrance Day began as a day to remember the dead of the First World War, the first Poppy Day was held in 1921 and the first silence was broadcast from the Cenotaph on the 11th November 1928. In time the dead of the Second World War were added, and then more modern conflicts. There has only been one year since 1945 in which no British service personnel were killed on active service and that was 1968.

Especially during this service we remember the horrors of war, the heroism of individuals and pray for our work towards reconciliation, peace and justice for the future. We pray for all of those still involved in peace keeping or conflict and for all civilians caught up in the horror of war.

On a trip to Belgium I have visited the Cemeteries, the Menin Gate, the interactive display of life in the trenches and in Israel the Jewish Exhibition. These were emotional, disturbing places that made me question deeply man's behaviour to man.

The nurse Edith Cavell, the night before her execution for helping British, French and Belgium soldiers escape, said to the Priest giving her communion: "Patriotism is not enough, I must have no hatred or bitterness towards anyone".

What an amazing statement, its sentiment echoed by Gordon Wilson after the bombing at Enniskillen's Remembrance Parade, which injured him and killed his daughter. He said he would pray for the killers every night.

This demonstration of Christian faith by two individuals is strongly moving. They both are able to follow in Jesus' footsteps. Luke 23: 34 'Father forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing'. Jesus died to save us all, the salvation of the cross is what gives us life and hope. As Christians we believe that God is with us in our pain and our distress and our death, that his love is with us always. Jesus says; 'I have told you these things so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world' (John 16:33)

Jesus preached 'Love your neighbour as yourself', but war brings human beings into terrible conflict. War brutalises and dehumanises. War can only be evil. Thomas Merton wrote: "It is enough to affirm one basic principle: anyone

belonging to class x or nation y or race z is to be regarded as subhuman and worthless, and consequently has no right to exist. All the rest will follow without difficulty. As long as this principle is easily available, as long as it is taken for granted, as long as it can be spread out on the front pages at a moment's notice and accepted by all, we have no need of monsters: ordinary policemen and good citizens will take care of everything." He was writing about Auschwitz but that principle still applies today.

Where do we find God? People found him in the trenches, at the time of their execution, at the time of the death of a loved one, others have trouble finding him at all in the mess that is war. P.T. Forsyth writes that at least war "aids God's purpose in that it shocks and rouses us to a due sense of what evil is, we are having a revelation of the awful and desperate nature of evil." He claims that God cannot be found on one side or another, he is not a partisan God, but he is the God of Redemption.

Job says: ' For I know that my Redeemer lives, and that at last he will stand upon the earth; and after my skin has thus been destroyed, then in my flesh I shall see God' (Job 19:25-26)

We have no record of Jesus commenting on war except: "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest" (John 18:36). War, fighting, is not of God, but shows how evil can work in man.

Today we remember all who have fought and died in war, we remember the injured, the grieving, the civilians whose lives have been lost or destroyed, there are so many, most not known to us. And yet we are affected by what they have been through, what they are going through and it can move us to work towards the breaking down of barriers, barriers of race or religion, barriers of hate or disrespect, barriers of pride or fear. Christ has commanded us to love one another, we need to discover and promote our common, God given humanity, and in our remembering of the fallen we commit ourselves to working towards what they have given us, the chance of a better world. To return the world to the creation given us by God who; 'saw all that he had made and it was good'.

In remembering we celebrate the gifts that we now enjoy, freedom, justice, peace and truth, and thus value them even more.

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