

Sunday 14th November – Remembrance Sunday

Sermon by Jenny Cass

On the 2nd Sunday in November each year we commemorate all those British servicemen & women who have died in wars and other conflicts since the onset of World War 1. For some it might be a day to remember history, for others there will be memories of family members and friends who served their country, those who survived and those who never came home. We are also aware of many who served in Iraq and Afghanistan and have returned suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and other injuries and find it so hard being back in ordinary life. Today brings us face to face with the suffering and death suffered by millions. It's a time to remember and show respect for all those who fought, suffered, died and those who are still suffering. Remembering is about more than setting aside a day a year to remind ourselves of the facts. Remembering rightly is about how we live in the light of those facts. Especially today as a community and as a nation and a world.

In the Old Testament the people of God, the Israelites, were forever being called by God to remember – to remember who they were, where they had come from – and it was usually at times in their life when things were going wrong. But that call to remember wasn't just about reminding themselves how they had got into their current mess, it was also a call, more than that, it was a promise to a future that would be different. Our Daniel reading talks about the resurrection of the dead and the promise of eternal life. And in Hebrews chapter 10 we are reminded that Jesus, through his death on the cross was the ultimate sacrifice for our sins and wrongdoings, providing a way for us to have a relationship with God our Father.

Now we are in November we will experience those dark cold days. Maybe you, like me, will comment to friends how these days often make us feel. Our spirits are low and we can feel a bit down. I was very fortunate recently to spend a week in Cornwall with my family where I enjoyed some sunny days, time to enjoy the beautiful scenery and visit new places, a chance to recharge the batteries and appreciate the wonders of God's creation. However I returned to some damp, cold and dark days and needed to remember the joys of the sunshine and experiences of my holiday. So often the news of world events such as global warming, conflicts between countries, sometimes resulting in fighting, deaths and injuries of innocent people, and diseases spreading through our world, together with what is happening closer to home can fill us

with worry and despair. We need to hear the Good News, we need to know that Christ is risen, that God loves us, is in control and that life is eternal. Today's Gospel reading hardly sounds like Good News. As Jesus came out of the temple, one of his disciples admired the building and the way it had been built with large stones. Surely the temple was a symbol of endeavour and lasting achievements. The temple, which Herod built, was one of the wonders of the world. It began in 20 BC and was not completed when Jesus was alive. Apparently some of the stones were 40 feet long by 12 feet high and 18 feet wide. It was these stones that impressed the disciples. Jesus, however, saw that they would not be there forever. In fact he prophesied that the stones would all be thrown down and the temple destroyed. Salvation was not found in the temple. In AD 70 Jerusalem fell to the Roman armies after a desperate siege. A million people died in the siege and 97,000 were taken into captivity. The Jewish nation was almost obliterated; and the Temple was set on fire and destroyed.

It is too easy to trust in things we think will last when only God is eternal. There will always be wars and rumours of wars. There will be famines, all sorts of pain and suffering. You cannot escape them in this world. But they are only the beginning of the birth pangs of the new age, the new kingdom that is dawning. We are assured that the final victory is in Jesus Christ our Lord. I found the words of this hymn particularly helpful and encouraging:

*All my hope on God is founded
Who will all my trust renew,
Safe through change and chance he guides me,
Only good and only true.
God unknown, he alone,
Calls my heart to be his own.*

*Human pride and earthly glory,
Sword and crown betray God's trust;
Though with care and toil we build them,
tower and temple fall to dust,
But God's power, hour by hour,
Is my temple and my tower.*

Our trust is not to be in any man made thing, not even in the Church or prayer; our trust is to be in God alone. Julian of Norwich (also known as Juliana of Norwich) was a Theologian and Mystic, born in 1343 and lived in Norwich, which was an important centre for commerce and that also had a vibrant

religious life. During her lifetime the city experienced the devastating effects of the Black Death, and a rebellion called The Peasants' Revolt. When she was 30, Julian was seriously ill and had a series of visions which she wrote down after she recovered. She wrote, 'God did not say "You shall not be tempest tossed, you shall not travail; you shall not be distressed."' But he said, "You shall not be overcome.'" It is this trust in God helped Julian understand these words that God spoke to her:

I shall make all things well.

I may make all things well,

and I can make all things well;

and you shall see yourself that all things shall be well.

No matter how dark the days, the Light of Christ is with us. We are never alone or left in the dark. God is always with us and promises us the victory through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Today we remember, God asks his people to remember, but in remembering we must also have a vision and hope for the future. God's ultimate promise for us is that he will dwell with us, that there will one day be no more mourning, no more tears, no more pain; wars and violence will cease. Jesus has returned to his Heavenly Father and is preparing a place for us. However, whilst we are here on earth, we all have a part to play in promoting peace, caring about our neighbours and our world and show love and compassion. We wear the red poppy which reminds us of all those millions of brave soldiers who gave their lives, the poppy has become a symbol of sacrifice.

We, in the Christian Church, also have a symbol. It's the Cross of Jesus. One of his great sayings is: 'Greater love has no-one than this, that he laid down his life for his friends.' (John 15:13). That is what Jesus did for us. Two great symbols of sacrifice- the Poppy and the Cross. Amen.