

Sunday 14th November – Remembrance Sunday

Hebrews 10:11-25

Mark 13:1-8

I was reading a novel a few weeks ago which was one of those novels covering two time periods – a story based in the recent past interacting with one from the time of the second world war. It was set on the west coast of Scotland, and the wartime thread talked of a peaceful and quiet village being transformed when the navy took over a sea loch for use as a war time base. The loch was ideally situated at one end of the Atlantic convoys and the other end of those which went around the top of Norway and Sweden to ports in Arctic Russia.

The story was not a story about the war – rather it was one with the war as a backdrop, talking about the ways that the war – and its proximity in this case – affected the lives of ordinary people. And for me – someone who was not alive at the time of the second world war and has never lived anywhere near a war zone – it gave a sobering insight into the horrors and uncertainties and sadnesses and despairs of those times. It centred around a sailor on those arctic convoys; it talked of the horrors of him seeing ships torpedoed and men struggling in vain to survive in freezing seas while he was helpless to give any assistance. And in the end it told of the hero losing his life at sea, and leaving his partner, who had just found out she was pregnant, devastated and alone. The modern day story running alongside was that of the girl born as a result of the pregnancy, now a grown woman trying to find out about her father who she never knew and who was never spoken about.

There is no glory in war.

Perhaps we are reminded of that when we see pictures on TV of people fleeing Afghanistan, people desperate enough to hang on to planes as they take off; perhaps we are reminded when we read of innocent people going about their daily business being blown up by a car bomb or shot by a sniper; perhaps we are reminded when a war grave is discovered containing the remains of hundreds who had died; maybe it's a day like today which brings it all back.

There is no glory in war.

In the passage from letter to the Hebrews which we had earlier we are urged to “hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering”. But how can we do that in the face of such pain and sorrow, in the face of such suffering and violence? What hope is there?

On one level Remembrance Sunday is about the past, it is about remembering those who died in wartime. Sons, daughters, husbands, wives, mothers, father, uncles, aunts. Perhaps today you are remembering someone in particular – someone who was close to you. And its right that we should do that.

But it cannot just be about looking back – it must also be about looking forwards. It has to be about the possibility that the future can be better than the past, that perhaps we will not make those same mistakes again. It surely has to be about us doing all we can to ensure that those lives were not lost in vain. It has to be about making sure that lessons can and will be learned. That there can be hope.

However, its very easy to think the problem is too big for ordinary people like us. Its an issue for nations and Governments. Its surely about a change in attitudes on a global scale, a change that begins to see that negotiation and agreeing to differ is a better way forward than confrontation and conflict. But it is surely important to have big dreams and hopes.

Its also important to look at whether what we as individuals can do can make any difference.

In the gospels we read that Jesus taught a completely different way of looking at life and how to live it than was the norm then and is now. Remember these words from the sermon on the mount

You have heard that it was said do not murder, but I say If you are angry, or if you insult your brother or sister you have sinned

You have heard that it was said do not commit adultery but I say If you look at a woman lustfully you have sinned

Turn the other cheek, give to those who beg from you

Love your enemy, pray for those who hate you

These were radical words. If everyone took them to heart the world would certainly change.

But Jesus was also realistic to know that wouldn't happen. That even those who believed in him would find it nigh on impossible to stick to his teaching.

There will be poor with you always, he said. And in today's gospel reading – There will be wars and rumours of wars; nation will rise against nation.

He was effectively saying. Yes, what I am showing you is the ideal, this is what we should work towards and hope for. But even the fact that we know it won't happen shouldn't stop us doing all we can to bring to about. Jesus talked about there being glimpses of the Kingdom of God in those times and places where people did respond to his teaching and example of self giving love. But he was clear that the fullness of the kingdom was something that would not be realised in this world. However, he never allowed that to be a reason for not doing what we can do to work towards its establishment.

Back to that passage from the letter to the Hebrews and we see how this is recognised. Hold fast to the hope, and consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds. The hope is evidenced by the things we do, no matter how small they are.

I asked earlier where is there hope when we see war and conflict and its consequence of suffering and pain all around us. Maybe the hope really is in the small things we do. The acts of love; the kind words; the seeking of peaceful solutions; the forgiveness and reconciliation that we can bring about in our personal relationships. The living the way Jesus showed us. In our Pilgrim course the other week as we looked at Jesus' radical teaching we paraphrased one of the beatitudes as *blessed are those who think more of their responsibilities than their rights*.

And here we can begin to see parallels with the other great issue of our day – climate change. At the COP26 conference which ends today there have been many words spoken, many intentions aired but very little in the way of concrete change promised.

We can become disheartened by the sheer magnitude of the problem, so much so that we lose all hope. But as with peace and conciliation, so with climate issues. We can make small differences; we can make contributions to the solution rather than simply being part of the problem. We can make representations to those with power – writing to an MP, becoming part of a

campaigning group. We can find hope in the small things that are possible rather than being discouraged by the big things that are way out of our control. Maybe the kinds of things we pledged ourselves to a few months back at our climate service.

So there is an opportunity today to look back, but also to look forward in hope. To see that hope is ordinary people like you and me being transformed into the people Jesus wants us to be, to live as he taught us and showed us.

It's a time to ask forgiveness for the ways we have messed things up in the past and to seek God's help and inspiration as we seek to move forward.

It's a time to look to the possible and not be put off by the impossible.

(leading into the Act of Remembrance)