

REMEMBRANCE

I want to concentrate on 3 things this evening: Remembrance, Hope & Peace starting with Remembering.

Remembering –what exactly?

For some it will be the names and faces of loved ones caught up in warfare from the past.

No matter how long ago the pain of loss can endure in some families through the generations, especially those who don't know where their loved ones died or are buried and have no grave to visit.

For me this month marks a year since my mum died on Nov 18th, so that will be hard and my dad would have been 100 years old this year.

Remembrance Sunday can be a very difficult day for those who mourn the loss of loved ones, especially children.

For others it might be situations around the world today that cause civil disturbances and refugees.

In our churches and community it can be difficult relationships or tensions and conflicts within families or between friends or colleagues.

Some bear mental, physical or spiritual scars.

Most of us have never experienced or seen National Service although some of us may have heard about war from our parents & grandparents: but we have continued to see British Armed Forces engaged in combat around the world and suffered from domestic terrorism and civil conflict. More recently there has been a huge escalation in knife and gun crime especially on the streets of London – with seven stabbings in the last week, & at least five of them fatal, some of them not that far away from us here in West Wickham.

So remembering means different things to different people and generations.

Our News broadcasts today report on armed warfare and conflicts which can result in feelings of great sadness, fear, anger or depression especially among our younger generations.

Our country was very different 100 years ago. Most people believed in God and went to church or chapel. They were also loyal to their King and country. Times were very hard for some and they struggled to make ends meet.

This led many young men to be caught up in the excitement and fervour of the recruitment campaigns, many even as young as 12 years old lying about their age. They were encouraged to take the King's Shilling, join up and fight for their God, King and country and enticed by a promise of a weekly wage.

Verse 13 from John 15, which Hazel has just read was also used: *“No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends”*. God commanded this because Jesus had already paid the ultimate sacrifice by dying for us on the cross.

These young men had no idea what was waiting for them on the battlefields and in the trenches.

None of us can fail to be moved by the thought of so many young lives lost by the waste and futility of the conflict of war and other events but the least we can do is to honour their memories and retell their stories.

Our War Memorial is a roll of honour naming local young men who lost their lives fighting for our country – some of their names appear on the Menin Gate, Tyne Cot and other Memorials which our Scouts visited last month, so let us begin by honouring their memory this week-end.

Sacrificial Love:

In the silence, as you listen to your own breathing, remember those who fought and died. Think of your own friends and family.

What would you be prepared to die for?

(Page 15, Remembrance 100 Silence booklet – remembrance100.co.uk)

HOPE

Have you ever taken a leap in the dark and been asked to do something that takes you out of your comfort zone?

How did that make you feel?

Did you experience feelings of excitement, could be a bit of an adventure or a thrill, a new beginning, a challenge or were you petrified, apprehensive & nervous.

Recently I have experienced a few challenges of taking on something new, including speaking to two groups of more than 90 people at the Cathedral last week, and I get in a terrible state but I always hear Chris Chapman saying when he taught us on our SPA course:

“Don’t worry, everything is possible with God”.

So it must have been for these young soldiers I mentioned earlier. They were full of hope and the joys of youth, it was new territory and they were gripped by excitement at going to war. Most of them had never travelled anywhere apart from maybe visiting relatives.

When they signed up they were all given a Bible as a source of hope for eternal peace.

During the summer I visited the York Army Museum and was very moved by the accounts of what happened in many small villages in Yorkshire and the North of England and the forming of the PALS battalions. This comprised of whole villages

sending their young men off to war as a unit. They all wanted to sign up to fight alongside their friends, colleagues and neighbours. People were led to believe that the war would be over by Christmas.

They were all so very young and inexperienced.

Their joy & excitement soon turned to despair after witnessing the horrors & atrocities of war and life in the trenches.

This led to heavy losses with whole villages losing all their young men, some of them within minutes of going into battle.

I quote from one of the letters home written by a young soldier: "O how I wish I had stayed at home with my Ma that Saturday when I went to buy her bread and joined the queue to sign up".

Families were left without any male relatives and women had to take on the role of the breadwinner.

This conjured up the image for me of Christ on the cross and Mary and the other women weeping at the foot of it. It's always those who are left behind who suffer.

The one thing these young men held on to was hope because they were fighting for peace.

In the book "Hear My Cry" (Bible Society - biblesociety.org.uk/ww1) there is an image of a painting by Pieter Bruegel, commented on by Sister Wendy Beckett, which resonated with me as someone who is visually impaired. It's entitled "Parable of the Blind" which depicts the horrors of trench warfare and its effect on the human spirit. She remarks that "If the blind lead the blind they both fall into the ditch" or trench which is in stark contrast to a photograph in the book from WW1 showing a line of soldiers blinded by poison gas, yet they are all walking straight because they have a leader who sees and is leading them into healing.

They have hope.

What is this Hope?

The Holy Spirit "Christ in you, the hope of Glory" as Paul puts it.

It's important to hold on to hope in challenging situations by putting our complete trust in God's peace to surround and keep us safe.

Hope remains in the midst of despair. It is a gift from God – he never lets us go and always hears us.

Tough Issues:

Think about what soldiers and their families go through. Few of us face such physical and emotional suffering, but we do have to work through tough issues.

In the silence, be aware of your own fears and anxieties. Whatever you are facing right now, ask for God's help and courage in that difficult situation.

(Page 23, Remembrance 100 Silence booklet – remembrance100.co.uk)

PEACE

What does the word Peace mean to you?

There are many kinds of peace – peace when the children are in bed asleep, peace and quiet of the countryside and so on.

It can mean different things to different people but here we are talking about God's Peace.

One example of this can be found in Philippians 4:

'Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.'

The lives and senseless deaths of those young men whom we mentioned earlier, remind us of the terrible cost of war and how our best response to their loss is the active bringing about of peace.

A few years ago we hosted 'The Forgiveness Project' here at St Francis and this showed that forgiveness can take many years of hard work and sacrifice. For this to happen we need to let go of the past, all the pain, hurt and bitterness because without forgiveness there is no future and no peace.

Jesus commanded that we should do it repeatedly – by doing so, it opens up the way for us to receive God's healing and helps us experience a deep sense of peace. In Matthew 5:9 Jesus said 'Blessed are the Peacemakers for they will be called children of God'.

Can we live in harmony with one another in response to God's commandment to love one another? To do this we must allow Jesus to come close to us.

God knows us individually - we are made in his image. It is interesting that there is an inscription on the unmarked graves of those who died which reads:

'Unknown' – 'Known unto God'.

Historical reports also tell us that these men knew the comfort of God's love and the promise of a heavenly home with no more death or sadness.

During the past week have you noticed instances of things like jealousy, anger, or envy in your life and by contrast have you noticed instances of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and other fruits of the Spirit? Paul says in his letter to the Galatians: 'Let us be guided by the Spirit'. Is now a good time to ask God for that openness and readiness to sense where His Spirit is leading us and to follow?

Would you, for example, be able to offer the gift of peace to everyone in our world? Could you offer the gift of peace to those near you at this moment?

Could you be a catalyst for peace in some small way today? A presence of peace among those you love, live and work with, here in our church at St Francis or within the local community in West Wickham?

Ask God for a deepening of peace in your own life, mind and heart today.

We pray that we can let go of any anger, hurt or bitterness and allow God's love to rule in our hearts and minds.

I'd like to finish with the last 2 verses from a poem by the army chaplain Geoffrey Studdert-Kennedy, more fondly known by the soldiers as Woodbine Willie, in which he is questioning God on how he can bear to watch all the horror and suffering that is happening around him.

It's called '**The Suffering God**':

"Bread of Thy Body give me for my fighting,
Give me to drink Thy Sacred Blood for wine,
While there are wrongs that need me for the righting,
While there is warfare splendid and divine.

Give me, for light, the sunshine of Thy sorrow,
Give me, for shelter, shadow of Thy Cross;
Give me to share the glory of Thy morrow,
Gone from my heart the bitterness of Loss".

God's help:

As you sit in the silence, clench your fists tightly, then (when you are ready) open them, showing your willingness to let go of the things that stop you finding peace in your life. Ask God for his help to work this out in the coming weeks and months.

(Page 27, Remembrance 100 Silence booklet – remembrance100.co.uk)

Amen.

Rowena Griffiths - Reflective Service, St Francis, 9 November 2018