

We Will Remember Them

Text: Micah 4:1-5, 1 Thess 5:1-11

Introduction

Today – 8th Nov, is Remembrance Sunday, and we find ourselves in lockdown once again – the second time in just seven months – it's been a truly extra-ordinary year. And, although we cannot hold our usual service of remembrance, that should not, indeed cannot stop us from remembering and honouring those who gave their lives for our freedom - both in the two world wars, but also in more recent conflicts as well. Lockdown notwithstanding, we will remember them.

Indeed, the words that I most closely associate with Remembrance Sunday is the phrase:

“They shall grow not old, as we that left grow old. Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn. At the going down of the sun and in the morning, we will remember them.”

This is a verse from Laurence Binyon's poem entitled, 'For the Fallen', written in 1914. They are read during the Remembrance Service, and they also adorn numerous war memorials around the world.

Those words are there as a reminder of what happened during the Great War and the sacrifice so many people made. They are also a reminder of the eternal hope that we have in Christ. But they have also become something a public statement, a pledge almost, that we will not forget them and the price they paid. And Remembrance Sunday is part of our honouring that pledge, that “we will remember them.”

Indeed memory is one of our great gifts; though exactly how it works is still something of a mystery. Although it isn't one of the five senses, without it we simply can't function properly. People who have been unfortunate enough to suffer severe memory problems, are often unable to lead a normal life. Indeed, losing one's memory would be like losing one of your five senses, such as sight or hearing.

Advanced

So a normal memory is crucial for any individual to function properly and enjoy a fulfilled life. But there's more to it than that. Our highly advanced memory has allowed human civilisation to develop in the way that it has; it's one of the characteristics that set us apart from the animal kingdom. Memory, coupled with skills such as reading and writing, allows information and knowledge to be passed on from one generation to another, allowing each new generation to build on the achievements of those who went before. The benefits of this process have been enormous - in

particular it has allowed us to learn valuable lessons from the past, including learning from our mistakes.

History Repeated

So it's ironic then, that if our memory is so advanced and our society so sophisticated - that learning from past mistakes is the one thing we seem unable to do. It was George Santayana who said that, *"those who cannot learn from history, are doomed to repeat it"*.

The First WW was billed as "The War to End all Wars". This sentiment, this confidence, was in part a reaction to the horrors of that particular conflict; with many believing that because the cost of modern warfare - in terms of human life and suffering - was so great, no nation would ever want to go to war again. It was also in part a reaction to the reasons for going to war in the first place, reasons that appeared to be completely insignificant as the conflict dragged on, and the casualties on all sides increased dramatically.

People were clearly asking the question, what is this appalling loss of life for? What have we achieved that has been worth so much suffering and so much loss? Questions that have been asked many times since in a number of more recent conflicts.

But, with the memory of the first WW still fresh in peoples' minds - barely 20 years later Europe was at war once again. History repeating itself in the most appalling way. And it's still happening.

Always With Us

But then again, to those of us who are familiar with God's Word, this should come as no great surprise - after all it was Jesus Himself who said:

"You will hear of wars and rumours of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen." (Matt 24:6)

Like the poor, war, it seems, will always be with us. But how did Jesus know this? How did He know that warfare and conflict would be a recurring problem, constantly plaguing mankind. Well, as God incarnate, Jesus is able to foresee the future, of course; but, not only that, Jesus also knew the reality of the human condition. The Bible tells us that the basic desires of the human heart are evil - greed, lust, hatred, envy, selfishness, deceit, unforgiveness and so on.

Moral Problem

All these desires - collectively known as sin - are at work in each one of us. Given free reign these desires will destroy us, both as individuals and collectively as a nation. So it has been correctly said, that the heart of the human problem, is the human heart.

The reason we are unable to learn from history; the reason we are doomed to relive the mistakes of the past, is not a memory problem, but a moral one.

Indeed, we see the evidence of this all around us on an almost daily basis, it's writ large in the news headlines as we read and hear about the appalling things people get up, and the ways in which we treat each other. The sinful passions and desires that drive individuals, can, and sometimes do spill over into wider national and even international conflicts.

Evolution?

In the 19th century there was a strong belief amongst many in the west, that mankind was on some kind of evolutionary path to Utopia. The belief was that we, as a species, would evolve to the point where society would be become almost perfect; "it was inevitable" they told us, "just a matter of time", they said.

It was of course an utterly vain hope, nothing more than a pipe dream. And when the First World War broke out that particular dream was well and truly shattered. And the truth of the biblical view of mankind, was now plain for all to see.

Evolution is not the answer to the human problem, God is the answer to the human problem, or more specifically Jesus Christ, the Son of God. As St Paul said: (1 Tim 1:15)

"Christ came into the world to save sinners"

Christ is God's answer to the problem of the human heart. As individuals we each need to turn from our sinful and selfish ways, turn to Christ and embrace Him as our Lord, and walk in His ways and in obedience to His Word. This is God's call to us, and not just to us, but to the whole world. It's the call to embrace Christ with all our hearts, for only then will our hearts be healed.

Rejection

But God's answer to our problems, Jesus Christ, has been firmly rejected by the liberal democracies of the Western World. But this rejection is again another sign of our failure to learn from the past; in this case from Israel's past.

Many times we read in the OT of how Israel rejected God and failed to obey His commands, and the result for the nation of Israel, was always disaster. I pray that God will be patient and merciful with our own nation, and I pray even more earnestly, that our nation will once again turn back to God, although currently there's very little evidence of this happening.

Nevertheless there are still many encouraging signs that God has not abandoned us, that He is still at work in the lives of individuals up and down the land, and for that we can be deeply grateful.

Although our nation may have turned its back on God, in the end though, Christ will prevail, for God's purposes cannot be thwarted by sinful man.

Hope

In our reading from the book of the prophet Micah, we have there a prophecy of a time when the work of Christ is all but complete, a time when violence will be no more, and nations will rid themselves of the weapons of war. A time when men will live in peace and prosperity, and Christ alone will be ruler and judge over the nations of the earth.

This is our hope - a hope that the Lord will certainly bring to fulfilment. But, as we do not know when Christ will return and finally establish His rule - we in the meantime, must commit ourselves to serve God, love our neighbour and pray for God's kingdom here on Earth. And we can do worse than heed the words of St. Paul to the Thessalonians, he said to them:

*“So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep,
but let us be alert and self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of
salvation as a helmet...
Jesus died for us so that we may live together with Him. Therefore encourage one another and
build each other up,
just as in fact you are doing.”*