

REMEMBRANCE SUNDAY 2018..100 YEARS SINCE END OF WW1

This is a day of mixed emotions..

remembrance, sadness, horror, thanksgiving, admiration, regret

Many of us no doubt think of loved ones who served or died in WW1 and all the wars since. I think of the finest Christian young man I ever knew , Len Chalice, spitfire pilot, shot down in flames just after D-day.. an only son.

Many of us lived through the Second World War and are thankful for our deliverance. Living in southeast London I lived through the blitz and the doodlebugs and the V2s but I remember the week invasion was expected and knew if the church bells rang it would have started. What would have happened if so? God turned the tide that week through the RAF. Indeed there were days of prayer in both world wars. Led by the Sovereign.

Locally, at the start of WW1, the Queen's Royal Regiment (West Surrey) landed at Le Havre in Aug 1914. Of the 998 men who landed only 32 were still alive in November .

WW1 has been called a 'senseless slaughter that set the stage for the bloodiest century in human history'.

A WW1 veteran said: 'There shouldn't be any wars. The killing of so many young men. The carnage was wicked. What for?'

But who was to blame? When I went as Rector to Manchester a lady who was a lovely member of the church said her husband would never come because he said 'if you had been in the trenches on the first world war you wouldn't believe in God either'. One day I was visiting the house and he was upstairs in the bathroom and didn't hear me come.. so he was on the way down the stairs when he saw me. He immediately trotted out his words.. 'But' I said,' it was horrific yet this should have made you cease to believe in man not in God'. It triggered his mind. He came back to church and died a believer a year later. It was 1948.. 50 years since the end of the war.

I did not need to ask how God is supposed to stop all evil. Would it mean vast swathes of people being wiped off the earth? Only if we were automatons

could we be manipulated like that. We have free will and with that we can as human beings rise to the highest in achievement and character or descend to the depths of evil which is from man's bias to sin. Both were true in WW1 and are always true.

Now we gather here as Christian believers. What do we discern from the history of wars? I suggest three observations.

1) THE ABUSE OF POWER

Power can be used for good but so often it becomes oppressive, ruthless.

Napoleon said: 'There is only one thing to do in world history – that is to acquire money and more money, power and more power'. When we think of the Kaiser, Hitler and Auschwitz, Mao (starving 25 million in one year) Stalin, Pol Pot, ISIS, we see the abuse of power.

There was abuse of power with some of the commanders on the WW1 battlefield sending men to almost unavoidable slaughter. Not least the one that ordered an attack on Mons hours before the armistice, for his own reputation. With nearly 3,000 killed. But others really cared.

(e.g. in my initial training in the army at 18, **NCOs** who liked power and a **sergeant major** who cared for us and inspired us.)

Today we see power even on the streets of our cities.. the power of those ready to kill with knives to command their drug trade. The sexual abuse; the greed of some executives.

So what do we learn from this as Christians. Surely we listen to our Lord and Saviour. He taught us that the greatest people are those who serve, not those who lord it over others, who wield power over others. As Philippians puts it: 'He, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his advantage, rather he made himself nothing'. He washed his disciples' feet. He went to the cross for us. That is greatness.

E.g. Bert Hollinshead

e.g. those who risked their lives to rescue others from the battlefield.

Wherever we can we should challenge the bosses and power brokers who are ruthless to make profit; who do not mind what happens to employees or their pension rights and so on; and we should challenge ourselves as to whether we

are affected by the power game in our lives and the 'I want' epidemic.. like Black Friday..

The greatest leisure occupation in our country is shopping... perhaps we are now Homo Shopiens 'I shop therefore I am.'. Tesco ergo sum. I see the Spice Girls are re-forming, not I hope to sing 'I wanna, wanna zigzag HA'. May we as Christians be givers more than wanna wannas, serving others 'for Christ's sake.' Ready to serve, rather than be served. Using our authority or position with outgoing care. That is greatness.

2. The VALUE OF PEOPLE

How do we evaluate a commander in his comfortable farm house behind the lines deciding to make another attack with possibility of 10,000 units being lost... not men.. rather dots on a map.. All for a few yards of ground, Into machine gun fire that would slaughter so many with ease. It was callous , cruel and unforgivable. Indeed it was described as murder, possibly a war crime in tis present era. Thankfully we do have modern examples of great commanders like Sir Richard Dannett, a great Christian, who as head of the army challenged the government over the poor living conditions of soldiers' families and was unpopular with the powers-that-be in government.

The troops themselves were more into Christianity than today. They sang many hymns. They also put their own words to the hymn tunes. Just before the Somme they responded to the Commander's charge by singing 'God be with you till we meet again'. Then 630,000 allied casualties.

At later battles they sang of the sacrifice of Jesus and then sang 'we are now the sacrifice'.

One hopes that many knew the truth of the Romans 8 passage read just now, that 'neither death nor life, nor anything else in all creation, can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus'.

How do we respond? Certainly in the value of every person. It is foundational to our faith that God made us in his image. In times of apartheid Archbishop Tutu used to say we should genuflect to each other recognising we are each in God's image, regardless of colour etc. Indeed Archbishop Sentamu, Arch of York says :

You white people..

When you are embarrassed you are pink

Hot	red
Suntanned	brown
Sick	green
Cold	blue
Scared	white
Angry	purple

When I am..... I am black, black. black

And you call me coloured! Racism goes deep as the recent burning of the Grenfell tower model showed... the children in the windows were all black..

Have you seen the film 'They will not grow old' (tonight 9.30pm.BBC2) remarkable.. shows the wonderful camaraderie and help to one another.. very moving.....even as the war was ending letting the German prisoners just mix in.. similar age.. all fed up with war.

So it is the value of every person. Good employers value their staff and workers;

The greatest commandments, as we know, are to love God and to love one's neighbour. Jesus advanced on that in our John 15 reading, that we are to love one another as he loves us.

That we should do all we can to live out those commandments; to seek to bring love and friendship and respect even when we differ;

Not least over Brexit or Trump; that we do what we can to pull back today's society from its deep divisions. People matter. Everyone.

3. QUALITY OF PEACE

Everything in us longs for peace in the world as Micah describes it.. though his prophecy is later taken up as being in the new heavens and the new earth where sin is no more.

When peace came in 1918 after the appalling war there had been 20 million deaths and 21 million wounded.. half military half civilian.

The Bible calls peace Shalom.. which is not just cessation of hostilities but more harmony, prosperity, welfare, tranquillity. It has the qualities of truth, nobleness, right, purity, loveliness ,admirable things.. so says Paul and adds 'put this into practice and the God of peace will be with you'. It was none of those things for the tens of thousands of destitute ex-soldiers after the first world war.. many of whom had only know the army and being looked after and obeying order.

Today we feel deeply for those with PTSD, Post Traumatic stress Disorder, the tragedy of six taking their own lives in the last week or so. A huge amount is being done for the wounded and disabled not least in the Invictus Games.. but as Christians if we are alongside those suffering we should be the representatives of God, the Father of compassion.

And we must work for peace wherever we can:

Jesus said: Blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called the children of God'

Zechariah's song in Luke 1.. that Jesus had come to guide our feet into the way of peace'.

Heb. 12:14: 'Make every effort to live in peace with everyone'. We should thus be peacemakers domestically, socially, in the church, in society wherever.

We learnt from Songs of Praise last Sunday that the British Legion hymn, a favourite in the WW1 is 'Make me a channel of your peace'. That would be a suitable prayer for us today.

1. Make me a channel of your peace
Where there is hatred let me bring your love
Where there is injury, our pardon, Lord,
And where there's doubt, true faith in you

Chorus:

O Master grant that I may never seek
so much to be consoled as to console:
to be understood as to understand,
to be loved, as to love with all my soul.

2. Make me a channel of your peace
where there's despair in life let me bring hope,
where there is darkness, only light,
and where there's sadness, ever joy.

3. Make me a channel of your peace:
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned.
in giving of ourselves that we receive,
and in dying that we're born to eternal life.

Conclusion

So on this special Remembrance Sunday let us resolve to oppose the abuse of power and live as those who serve; may we seek to love everyone in Christ's name; may we be purveyors of peace in this troubled world.

And on this day of sorrow and remembrance may the glorious hope of eternal life through Jesus Christ crucified and risen for us, burst through everything else. And then in a few weeks may we sing from the heart as a prayer, with the angels: 'Glory to God in the highest and peace to his people on earth'.

