

Remembrance Sunday 2020

They shall not grow old as we that are 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.

We will remember them.

Collect

God, our refuge and strength,
Bring near the day when wars shall cease and poverty and pain shall end,
That earth may know the peace of heaven through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

Readings *(please note – these are not the readings set for the Third Sunday before Advent)*

Revelation 21.1-7

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,
'See, the home of God is among mortals.
He will dwell with them;
they will be his peoples,
and God himself will be with them;
he will wipe every tear from their eyes.
Death will be no more;
mourning and crying and pain will be no more,
for the first things have passed away.'

And the one who was seated on the throne said, 'See, I am making all things new.' Also he said, 'Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true.' Then he said to me, 'It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life. Those who conquer will inherit these things, and I will be their God and they will be my children.'

John 15.9-17

As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.

'This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.'

A Reflection for REMEMBRANCE SUNDAY

Despite lockdown, today, all those who have lost their lives in the service of their country over the last century are being remembered and honoured in Britain. There will be a much reduced National Act of Remembrance and representatives of local communities will pay their respects at memorials in even the remotest villages but these events will happen. In the immortal words of the poet Laurence Binyon: "At the going down of the sun and in the morning we will remember them."

It sounds straightforward but remembrance can be complicated because different people have different memories and attitudes. Those of us who are older may have personal memories of World War 2 and have close family members who lost their lives in the two world wars in the first half of the last century. But for younger people both World Wars seem like remote history. And how do we bring in memories of more recent conflicts? Remembering becomes more complicated as years go by but this Sunday remains important.

Although our imaginations have been brought to life by graphic images of fighting around the world, and although we have a heightened sense of the horrors of war, still for many of us Remembrance Sunday is not about remembering our own memories, but about remembering other people's experiences, other people's memories, - it is a corporate memory, a national memory - a remembering we do together.

Remembering, in itself, can be passive, unproductive. To make it meaningful, it must have two essential elements. First, we remember in order to understand. Battlefield tours feature increasingly in holiday brochures. Many people now visit the battlefields not only of two world wars, but also of Crimea and Waterloo. There can be a macabre delight in seeing where men fought and died. A more positive approach is to understand the conditions in which they existed, the hazards and privations that surrounded them even before they went into battle. The sacrifice for many was not only of their lives, but of the accepted norms and decencies of everyday living. We remember in order to understand.

Secondly, we remember in order to look forward. The First World War was supposed to be the war to end all wars, and to bring about a land fit for heroes. These well-meaning slogans were to become resentful protests directed against the political leaders of the time. Even now, our good intentions of peace and prosperity for all have proved to be nothing more than dreams. We are still assailed daily by wars and rumours of wars. As we remember, we have to look forward in faith and hope. This sharing together of our common past - this remembrance that we do today - also has strong implications for our common future that we will do tomorrow.

Many of us have visited the battlefields in Northern Europe of the First World War and seen the vast cemeteries with their row upon row of graves. It is still hard to picture the devastation that there must have been with buildings, roads and trees turned into a sea of mud and a grave for so many. But with the coming of the warm weather, the only living thing that seemed to survive – the poppy – brought life and hope, colour and reassurance to those still left. It was this that inspired John McCrae to write the poem that still inspires us today.

In Flanders fields the poppies blow
Between the crosses, row on row
That mark our place; and in the sky
The larks, still bravely singing fly
Scarce heard amid the guns below.

We are the dead, short days ago
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,

Loved and were loved, and now we lie
In Flanders fields.

Take up our quarrel with the foe:
To you from falling hands we throw
The torch; be yours to hold it high.
If ye break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
In Flanders fields.

After reading this poem an American lady Moina Michael made a personal pledge to “keep the faith”. She vowed to wear a red poppy as a sign of remembrance and acceptance of the challenge for change – the tradition was later adopted by the British Legion and is widely accepted today.

And remembrance should be something familiar to all Christians around the world. Not only once a year, but Sunday by Sunday and day by day - Do this in Remembrance of me” said Jesus. And so we take bread and the wine, we bless it, break it and share it in accordance with Jesus’s command from that first Maundy Thursday meal so long ago, - and we remember him. Not just remembering a dim and distant story we once heard about in Sunday School when we were children, but remembering a different story - a future story, remembering a new world we have only dared to dream about.

Just as it is easy to see Remembrance Sunday as simply looking back into the past and staying there, so too it is easy in many aspects of our life to look back to the past and get stuck there. But, as any real Remembrance Sunday which is worth the terrible high price that was paid for it, looks back, so that it might also look forward into peace and justice for a future world. In the same way, a real faith is worth the high price that has been paid for it, also looks back at the familiar stories, so that we might look forward to a better world. Ours is a religion of change, of hope, of new challenges, new promises, new horizons and new developments - of not seeing and then seeing, or not understanding and then with new scientific discoveries coming to understand, of not knowing and then gradually coming to know.

A little while, and you will no longer see me, and again a little while, and you will see me. some of his disciples said to one another, “What does he mean We do not know what he is talking about. Jesus said, you have pain now; but I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice,

In this time of lockdown, we need to remember – not just remember the past but re-member the future – to remember day by day, hour by hour, in our thoughts and words and deeds the promised kingdom to come.

*God of peace,
whose Son Jesus Christ proclaimed the kingdom
and restored the broken to wholeness of life;
look with compassion on the anguish of the world,
and by your healing power make whole both people and nations;
through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, Amen*