

Sermon for Remembrance Sunday –

Lectionary Texts: Job 19:23-27a) Psalm 17:1-9

2 Thessalonians 2:1-5; 13-17 Luke 20:27-38

“O that my words were written down! O that they were inscribed in a book! O that with an iron pen and with lead they were engraved on a rock for ever! For I know that my Redeemer lives, and that at the last he will stand upon the earth...[and] I shall see God...”

(Job 19:23-26)

- Today's first reading was from the book of Job in the Old Testament – has anyone ever read it in its entirety? If not you should, Job is a challenging but interesting story. Job was a man who had everything but whom, in the story, he was tested to see if he would still love and obey God in adversity. So, bit by bit, everything that was important in his life was taken away from him. His property, his children, his wealth, his health – all these things were taken from him yet he still remained strong in his faith in God.

And this passage from Job that I have quoted made me think of the huge significance and value of having certain things written down

- I recently spoke with friend who is an army chaplain and he told me that one of the first questions the family and friends ask, if & when that dreaded moment of the death of their son/daughter/brother/sister/father/mother/friend comes... is: “Did they leave me a letter?”
- And how much difference it makes if they have.... One of his main jobs is to help soldiers write 'last letters' before every operational tour – just in case they never make it back.
- I remember, after my Chris's death, in action, how I longed for a letter that I could turn to, to remind me of his words and feelings for me... But he never was one for writing letters.

Today's readings are all about people grappling with the realities and cost of suffering and evil in this life, too... asking where real hope is to be found.

- Firstly we have Job – who hits the bottom of his suffering and is fed up with his friends telling him that he must have committed some sin to have been treated in this way. Job knows that he has done nothing wrong, that his suffering is not related to his behaviour, that he is innocent and yet suffers.
- And in Luke's gospel, Jesus takes on the Sadducees
- As compared to the Pharisees – the group of Jews who believe God will keep his promises and bring about justice beyond this world – the Sadducees believe that God's power is limited to life in this world. They didn't believe in angels or the possibility that there could be anything more and challenged Jesus with the conundrum of whose wife the widow would be would be, but Jesus simply responds with a theological 'shrug. 'In eternal life, people wont die so it's irrelevant to get hung up about whether someone has been the first, second or even seventh wife in this life.
- So many people struggle with questions such as:
- How could a good and loving God let terrible suffering happen? How can a good and loving God let wars take place and even, how can he let me hurt this much?
- All we can do is trust. Whatever forces try to threaten, undermine and oppose – we can trust in Jesus. I believe that one day when we meet him in heaven I believe that everything will come clear.

For us here in 21st century England, today is Remembrance Sunday, we reflect on all those who have died as a result of war and terror – we think of those on active service and those who have been caught up in war but weren't part of the armed forces.

Remembrance Sunday draws human beings together in a way is almost unique. Young and old gather to remember and reflect, each allowing some aspect of the reality of war to touch their soul.

Commented [1]:

Some who gather will bring new or not so new memories of active service. Some will carry in their heart the memory of a specially loved one who made the ultimate sacrifice. Many will be stretching their imaginations to try to grasp what those people must be feeling. All will be praying that as time moves forwards human beings will find ways of resolving their differences in ways which do not involve terrorism or warfare.

For me there are two special factors on Remembrance Sunday- the silence and the poppy.

On 11 November and also at 11am today we will hold a 2 minute silence.

The silence of Armistice Day – the silence of Remembrance Sunday - is the recognition that in order to do justice to what has happened, to do justice to the cost of war – its sacrifice and shame - we do not need to tell another story or sing another song. Rather we need to be silent together. We need to recognise that sometimes, in the frenetic world in which we now live, the most important thing we can do is hold our tongue and pause for a moment.

One of the things that we notice when we are silent is the sound of our own breathing. It is something we don't listen to or think about enough. We all breathe the same air; in and out it goes, in and out of each and every one of us. This is true for us in today's community of remembrance here. It is the same for those engaging in conflict.

We remember not to allow the past to capture us in its worst moments but to build us up for the future. We remember not only to honour the fallen, but to raise them in our hearts and to promise to live lives worthy of their sacrifice.

Jesus knew the power of remembrance when he took a loaf of bread, blessed it and gave it to his friends saying, 'this is my body 'and gave them wine to drink saying, 'this is my blood 'and told them to remember him in this way.

It is our duty this day to ensure that those who in the cause of peace have given, and continue to give, of their life, their health, their youth, are honoured and remembered. But in our remembering we must also vow to give of ourselves for the good of humanity, especially of the generations yet to come; who will themselves one day stand in silent remembrance and grow in hope.

The second symbol for me is the poppy and I wear my poppy with pride.

The Poppy is a symbol of our remembering. But what happens on Tuesday, or Wednesday or the next day, next week, next month? Will we put our remembering away until next year - when we will get it out again and brush it off.

God's ultimate promise for us is that He will dwell with us, we read in the book of Revelation chapter 21 verse 4 " He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

When you remove your poppy from the coat it's been on these last few days think about what you will do with it, and what will you do with the remembering that it symbolises – Perhaps you will put it in a particular place from where it'll continue to nudge you in your remembering but perhaps the memories will be too painful to have on show everyday, perhaps you can lock them in your heart. But whatever you decide, let your decision be a symbol of the vision God calls us to take up in our future – individually, as a community, as a nation – that by our living, We will remember them.

They shall grow not 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.

When you go home tell them of us and say, for your tomorrow we gave our today.' Amen

220 words

Prayers

The response to the prayers is: "Thank you Lord"

On this Remembrance Day we want to thank you Lord for all who have died that we may live.

Thank you Lord (PAUSE)

For all who suffered pain that we might know joy.

Thank you Lord (PAUSE)

For all who had to cope with being in prison that we might know freedom.

Thank you Lord (PAUSE)

For all those who willingly served in the armed services or on the home front, sacrificing what they wanted so that we can live in peace.

Thank you Lord (PAUSE) Amen.

And now let's pray for those who are currently serving in wars and conflicts. Please say the responses that are in bold.

Heavenly Father,

We bring before you those who are currently serving in wars and conflicts around the world.

For those facing the unknown,
give them courage.

For those struggling with physical exhaustion,
give them strength.

For those serving in desperate situations,
give them hope.

For those leading others and making difficult decisions,
give them wisdom

and for the families left at home,
give them comfort.

In Jesus 'holy name we pray.

Amen.