

Lord God, may we be open to your Holy Spirit as we draw closer to you. Amen

Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again-

Past - present - future

Central beliefs in our Christian faith, said together by the whole worshipping community in a service of Holy Communion - and all 3 parts to be found in our 2 readings today and which give us strength at this time of remembering :

- Today on Remembrance Sunday : remembering the Armed Forces who died in 2 world wars and other conflicts to bring about peace and prevent tyranny;
- Last Monday on All Souls day and throughout November : remembering our own loved ones whom we love but see no longer
- During this second lockdown: remembering the frontline NHS workers, carers and others all over the world who have given their lives to save others during the global pandemic.

It's good to remember those who have died

It's good to let them live on through us in the present

It's good to have the Christian hope of being together again in the future in the kingdom of heaven.

Past - present - future: God is there in all of them.

Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again

In our first reading ,Paul is writing probably one of his earliest letters to a young church he founded in Thessalonica (strangely in the New Testament, Paul's letters coming after the 4 Gospels and Acts of the Apostles are ordered by length of letter rather than in date order, so this letter comes 8th in the list) ,

He is encouraging them in their faith and trying to reassure them about death and the kingdom of heaven. Because this is only a few years after Jesus died, the early Christians believed Jesus would return in their lifetime and people would be gathered up to enter the kingdom with Jesus when he returned again. But what they ask, about those who have already died? "Don't worry " says Paul , the dead will be raised first, and in v 14:

"For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have died"

We are now over 1500 years on since Paul wrote those words and Christ has not yet returned to earth, but the hope of life after death in the kingdom of God's eternal love is very powerful and very reassuring for Christians , still waiting for the second coming of Christ. Because God the Father raised Jesus from the dead, the gateway to completeness and wholeness of life has been opened to all who say yes to God's all- encompassing love and forgiveness for our sins.

Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again-

- Our Gospel reading today helps us look more closely at the last of the 3 tenses: the future: Christ will come again and it emphasizes we must be ready for this, not knowing when it will be
- I wonder how often we really think about Jesus coming to earth again?
- The words trip off the tongue but is it too scary to think of.....a day of judgement when Christ will see what we're really like as people, how we act towards one another, how we are utterly trashing God's creation?
- This parable gives us a reminder that we mustn't let ourselves be caught out when Jesus comes back.....we must be prepared - like a good boy scout! -

Let me explain a little about the setting of the parable : Weddings in Jesus's time , unlike ones in our culture ,went on for perhaps a week of celebration and the groom arrived at the bride's house for the marriage ceremony at an unspecified time. The bride waiting with her bridesmaids until the call went out that the groom was making his way to the house. Then the bridesmaids would gather in the procession to bring the groom into the wedding venue - if this was after dark, they would need lighted lamps to join in . In the parable , 5 of the bridesmaids were ready and had thought ahead and got extra oil for their lamps in case the groom didn't arrive early on, whereas 5 hadn't planned for such a long

wait and had run out of oil and by the time they bought some more, the procession and the moment had passed and they were not even allowed in to the party!

- Do you plan things or often just wing it?
- We all get caught out by events, but do you learn from the experience?

Do you cram too much into your day so you are forever catching up, becoming more and more stressed until you collapse exhausted on the sofa, with unhealthy snacks and a drink having skipped a wholesome meal a few hours previously?

Or get side-tracked for too long by social media, or internet shopping or endless chats with your friends or whatever hobby you are really into.

Then you ...and Irun the risk of not spending enough time with God, not being guided enough by the Holy Spirit and of being caught out when Jesus comes to earth again-because we have focussed too much on loving ourselves and not loving God or our neighbour .

Perhaps during these 4 weeks of lockdown we can make a bigger effort to focus on our faith, The Church of England has called for a month of prayer during lockdown .

How we are to be ready for Christ coming again-?

Will he find us working for God's kingdom, or will he find us, like the foolish bridesmaids having used up our resources, living only for today and not having made any plans or effort to take care of others , our planet or even ourselves through committing to and putting our trust in Jesus, in his guidance and his love to transform our lives.

Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again-

Past - present – future: God is there in all of them

We honour those who have died - we honour Jesus

We let those who have died shape our lives in good ways- we let Jesus's Holy Spirit guide our lives

We have hope in eternal life where we shall be reunited with our loved ones through God's love for us - we work towards the day when Christ will come again and God's kingdom will reign on earth as in heaven.

- Whatever point in time we live in , there will always be past, present and future influencing our lives and these 3 things make us who we are as individuals and as a society, and perhaps even more so this Remembrance Sunday as a nation- so many tumultuous things coming together to shape our future in Britain- Brexit, a pandemic, lockdown, the church building being closed for acts of worship, a new president in the USA with all the changes that will bring for the world.
- But God's love , through Jesus Christ, is upholding us in all this uncertainty and tumult and gives us a structure and meaning to our lives if we want to embrace it - Jesus's invitation is always there, for us to be welcomed with open arms as were the 5 wise bridesmaids who were ready to greet the bridegroom whenever he arrived.

If we focus on that invitation from Jesus, trust him, pray and step back to listen to the promptings of his Holy Spirit, we can be energised.... we can feel loved..... and we can be empowered....

to live our lives for Him who died, is risen and will come again in glory. Amen

Matthew 25:1-13

The Parable of the Ten Bridesmaids

25 “Then the kingdom of heaven will be like this. Ten bridesmaids took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. **2** Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. **3** When the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them; **4** but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. **5** As the bridegroom was delayed, all of them became drowsy and slept. **6** But at midnight there was a shout, “Look! Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.” **7** Then all those bridesmaids got up and trimmed their lamps. **8** The foolish said to the wise, “Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.” **9** But the wise replied, “No! there will not be enough for you and for us; you had better go to the dealers and buy some for yourselves.” **10** And while they went to buy it, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went with him into the wedding banquet; and the door was shut. **11** Later the other bridesmaids came also, saying, “Lord, lord, open to us.” **12** But he replied, “Truly I tell you, I do not know you.” **13** *Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.*

1 Thessalonians 4:13-end

13 But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters,^[a] about those who have died,^[a] *so that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope.* **14** For since we believe that *Jesus died and rose again*, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have died.^[a] **15** For this we declare to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will by no means precede those who have died.^[a] **16** For the Lord himself, with a cry of command, with the archangel’s call and with the sound of God’s trumpet, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first. **17** Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air; and so we will be with the Lord for ever. **18** Therefore encourage one another with these words.