

May the words of my mouth and the thoughts of all our hearts be always acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, our strength and our Redeemer. Amen.

Ecclesiastes 3 verse 1 tells us 'To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven:'

Today it is time for remembrance.

Remembrance Sunday draws us together as human beings in a way that is almost unique. Young and old gather to remember and reflect, each of us allowing some aspect of the reality of war to touch our souls. Some who gather will bring new or not so new memories of active service. Some will carry in their heart the memory of a 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 forward, human beings will find ways of resolving our differences and resisting aggressors that do not involve warfare.

We have come here today to remember all those who have fallen in wars present and past. For many, this year that remembrance has a special poignancy, having commemorated the 100th anniversary of the Gallipoli Campaign where so many of our friends from Australia and New Zealand gave their lives; the 75th anniversary of the Battle of Britain, when so many brave young men took to the skies time and time again between July and October 1940 to protect our cities from wave after wave of enemy planes; so many losing their lives in the process. We also commemorated the 70th anniversary of Victory in Europe and Victory in Japan. We remembered the truly terrible scenes as the concentration camps were liberated and the appalling state of those prisoners of war returning from the Far East. It is eternally important that we remind ourselves of the dreadful cost of war if we are ever to live in peace.

The book of the prophet Micah was written around 700 years before Christ, and in our reading today he foretold a future of hope, an ideal world, a world where nations come together in peace instead of war. His words came against a background of violence with the fall of Samaria in the North and instability in the region created by the aggressive superpower of Assyria. However, Micah never lost faith for the future. His vision saw a time when the arms of war would be turned into farming tools and people would live in peaceful community. All of us here, I think, long for a time when the sword might be beaten into ploughshares and spears into pruning hooks; or perhaps in modern parlance – a time when Kalashnikovs will become combine harvesters! A beautiful picture

were the tools of destruction are transformed – to produce life-giving abundance. A place where justice reigns for all people, where no-one will need to learn the arts and sciences of war, where all will live in peace and no-one will fear anyone else.

Meanwhile, the reading from the letter to the Romans in verses 35 and 36, is honest about the present reality – a reality of tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, sword; a reality in which people are ‘killed all the day long’. And yet this same reading tells us again of a well-rehearsed but still astounding truth: **nothing** – not even all these horrors – is able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

If we want to find God, of course we can find him here in church today. But he is not only here. He was in the trenches in the First World War, and at Gallipoli. He was there when telegrams bearing news of tragedy and loss were opened and read back at home. He was there in the horror of the concentration camps. He was there in the Japanese prisoner of war camps. He was there in the hospitals and there in the silent poppy fields. And today, he is in the complexity and raw suffering in every place in which there is a struggle between what is right and what is easy, every place where the eternal battle between good and evil is played out in people’s lives.

However dark the world seems to be, the light of God is stronger. When hatred seems to be taking over, the love of God is stronger. And when all around is destruction and death, the love of God is stronger. For there is nothing that can separate us, from God’s love – not in this world, and not in the world to come.

Our focus today is quite rightly on those whose lives have been given and taken away, and those who today still risk life and limb in the service of their country, and in the pursuit of peace. But what we must not do is fall into the trap of thinking that peace making and peacekeeping can be left solely to the professionals: the army, the navy, the air force, the marines, the politicians, the decision makers of the world, as if the pursuit of peace were a specialist activity that can safely be left to others. It is our duty – all of us – as children of God to be peacemakers, to work to break the continual spiral of violence and aggression which causes so much destruction and death and grieves the heart of God.

The Christian understanding of ‘peace’ is more than the avoidance of war, more than the absence of conflict. It is about building relations between people, between communities, between nations, which positively and constructively

creates a love and care for others founded on justice for all. Just as the people of Coventry did after the Second World War, when led by its Cathedral it acknowledged the devastation our country brought to cities like Dresden, and worked to build a new relationship of peace. We need to build relationships of peace and justice in our world, starting right here in our communities. And for that we will always need God's help – to change each and every one of us, into people who have a passion for peace and justice, and a care and love for everyone. For if we do nothing, then the last verse of the poem I am about to read you written by Bill Mitton, will continue far into the future and our children's futures:

The Crosses

I stood there before the crosses
glowing white in row on row
Everyone a young life cut short
as the names upon them show.

The dates they died below the names
tell of wars now passed and gone
Passchendaele, the Somme, and Mons
of battles fought, and lost or won.

History remembers, as it should
these men who fought and died
Whilst for their families left behind
a dull sorrow tinged with pride.

The faces of boys held now in Sepia
who died in days long gone
yet living on in memories
and hearts, still holding on.

Yet despite the hurt and grief here
what with horror makes me fill
Is that when I look behind me
there are more new crosses growing still.

The driving force for peace must come from us, it must come from our remembrance of those who have given their lives in war. Peace will not come if we forget; it won't happen if we wait for others to work for it. It is through our vigilance, our voice, and our prayers that peace and light will emerge. Peace does not begin and end in Afghanistan or Syria.

In the conflicts of our lives here, in these villages, in our workplaces and schools and homes and neighbourhoods, these are also places in which we are called to be bringers and forgers of God's peace. Peace is a precious commodity; it comes from trust, patience, tolerance and faith. It is not unilateral, it cannot be "Peace only on my terms", it results from mutual agreement and understanding. Peace has never been easy to achieve; it is very hard work to establish and keep the peace at any level in our society.

Yet, regardless of the difficulties, peace must be what we all strive for, what Micah foresaw, what Jesus taught us.

The poppy wreaths and crosses that are being laid at War Memorials across the country as we meet in church this morning, remember not only those from this and other communities who have given their lives; but will also remember the injured and their families for whom we have no recorded names.

The Poppy is our symbol of Remembrance, but let us also remember through the remembering of pain and loss that there is always the light of hope, love and faith through Jesus Christ.

So let us commit ourselves to work as hard as we can for peace, both here and throughout God's beautiful but broken world. To follow Jesus' example: to love God and love our neighbour as ourselves.

In Jesus' name. Amen.