

Remembrance Sunday Farningham 2011

Remembrance Sunday seems to become more and more poignant each year.

Last year, to add to the people who died in the first and second world wars, and to a soldier killed in Northern Ireland buried in Lullingstone, we added Sapper Mark Smith.

This year, we add another name: that of Oliver Alexander, a royal marine also killed in action in Afganhistan.

When I was growing up in the late 70's, Remembrance Sunday seemed to be declining in significance. Each year the line of veterans from the First World War marching past the Cenataph in London got shorter and shorter.

You could almost believe that one day the survivors of war and those who mourned the loss of loved ones in armed conflict would have passed away.

Remembrance Sunday began to take on a sense of gratitude to God that we had enjoyed forty years of peace.

But now, after the Falklands, two Iraq wars, Afganhistan and recently a mercifully short campaign in Libya, we are much more aware once again that all is not well in the world.

And as young men and women come back from Afganhistan injured or worse, our thoughts turn once again on Remembrance Sunday to those who mourn the loss of loved ones and those who suffer the effects of fighting in wars.

How important it is that we remember to pray, not just today, but throughout the year, both for those who suffer as a result of war, and for those who are serving our country and their fellow men on active service at this time.

And with each life lost or injury sustained, we are reminded again that we must be about the important task of praying for, and working for peace.

St Paul reminds us in his first letter to Timothy to pray for those in authority, that we may live peacefully.

And the United Nations, and the leaders of this and all nations must figure strongly in our prayers.

But whilst we might pray for peace, we should not be surprised if our prayers are not answered; at least yet.

Jesus himself said,

“you will hear of wars and rumours of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is yet to come.”

(Matthew 24.6)

Wars are a sign, says Jesus, that we are in the last days;
And they are a reminder that as human beings we are in a mess; that we cannot save ourselves and that we need Jesus;
We need Jesus to return and put the world to rights.

St Paul writes in Romans 8.22:

“For we know that up to the present time all of creation groans with pain, like the pain of childbirth” as it waits for Jesus to create a new heaven and earth where swords are beaten into ploughshares and people live in peace.

But how can we hope that this will be the case?

That Christ will come one day and remove all that is evil from the world and establish his reign of justice and peace?

Well, we talk a great deal on Remembrance Sunday about sacrifice as we remember those who made the ultimate sacrifice of laying down their lives for the good of others.

And in the sacrifice of those who have died in the service of others, we catch just a small glimpse of the sacrifice that Jesus made for us.

Hebrews 10.26:

“Now, when all the ages of time are nearing an end, he has appeared once for all, to remove sin through the sacrifice of himself.”

Like a soldier might throw himself in front of his comrade to ‘take the bullet’ for him, buying his comrades life with his own, so Christ died in our place, to save us from the consequences of our sin and buy our eternal life.

But of course, this was not the end for Jesus.

We have it on good historical evidence that Jesus did not stay dead.

Rather, three days after his death, God raised Jesus back to life again. And it is the experience of every Christian that Jesus is alive today.

Jesus' resurrection from the dead, a feat never achieved by anyone else in the whole of history, proves that Jesus is who he says he was – even the Son of God,

and proves that we can trust implicitly everything he said, including his promise that he will return to create a new heaven and a new earth, free from all tears, pain and suffering.

Therefore those of us who are Christians can approach Remembrance Sunday not just with sadness about the suffering of the world around us and a sense of pride at those who give of themselves, but also with a sense of hope for the future.

The world will not always be like this.

So, permit me to give you a challenge this day:

We honour the memories of those who have given their lives for the sake of others; for the cause of peace and justice; to help create a better world.

Do we, in the same way, honour Jesus Christ, who gave of himself for us; so that we might have peace with God and enjoy the better world that he is going to create?

One of my favourite saints is Maximilian Kolbe.

He was a Catholic priest who found himself in a German Concentration camp during the Second World War.

After one man escaped from the camp, the guards randomly chose ten men to die as punishment.

One of those men was Francis Gagenitze.

Francis was a married man with children, and as he was picked out, he cried for mercy; who he said would care for his wife and children.

Maximilian Kolbe volunteered to die in his place.

He died a remarkable death, turning the underground bunker where he and the other nine men died into a chapel, where they worshipped and prayed and died in full assurance of eternal life with God.

Francis Gagenitze lived a long and full life; wherever he went telling people about the small, catholic priest who had died that he might live.
In a sense, he lived to honour the one who saved him.

Will you accept the salvation that Jesus offered you?
Will you live to honour him and bring glory to him?

For this is the way, the only way, that we might, when Christ returns become part of his new heaven and new earth
Where our prayers will be finally and fully answered, and we will be at peace.