

Father, may these spoken words be faithful to your written word and lead us to the living Word, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

Ecclesiastes 3 verse 1 tells us 'For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven.'

Today it is a 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. 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, as it is now 100 years since the guns fell silent after the war to end all wars. Unfortunately, we know all too well this hope has not been fulfilled and perhaps this is one reason why it is eternally important that we remind ourselves of the dreadful cost of war. We have just remembered in the silence at the War Memorial those who gave their lives for the freedom which we sometimes take for granted.

Silence is the true language of remembrance. But there are two kinds of silence.

One is because no one wants to communicate. This is the frosty, thick, awkward, hostile, silence which is an outward expression of irreconcilable hostility. Such silence is a form of shouting. And it is often a prelude to violence. The guns and bombs begin only after the talking has stopped.

The other sort of silence is calm and mutual, it is the recognition that what matters is so much more than we can ever say that we ought to honour that fact by being quiet.

The silence of Remembrance Sunday is this sort of silence. It 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 know too that the power of remembrance is that while it connects us with sadness it also inspires us with hope.

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' telling them to remember him in this way. For of such simple things is the kingdom of God – the long hoped for future of justice and peace, mercy and truth.

How might we work towards achieving this beautiful picture? In the Gospel reading Jesus tells us how; 'This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.' The love that Jesus is speaking of here is God's unconditional love for each of us; a love that overcomes hatred and fear. However dark the world seems to be, the love 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. 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 this poem by Bill Mitton, which you have heard before, 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 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; 'This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.'

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.

Let us pray; merciful God, we offer to you the fears in us not yet cast out by your perfect love. May we accept the hope you have placed in the hearts of all people – and live lives of justice, courage and mercy, through Jesus Christ our risen redeemer. **Amen.**