

Worship for Sunday 13th November 2022

Remembrance Sunday

Call to worship

All is quiet this November morning, the ground hard, the air mild, autumn leaves scattered, still.

Now we too are still, and will soon fall silent....to remember, yes, but also to ask, not "Why", but "What now?" and, above all, to let God speak.

And when God speaks, perhaps we will be invited to confess our ways that did not make for peace.... to reconsider our choices, and to figure out what we might do next.

We come to honour God, to remember sacrifice with thankfulness, and to nerve ourselves to work for peace.

Hymn 161: O God, our help in ages past

O God, our help in ages past,
our hope for years to come,
our shelter from the stormy blast,
and our eternal home!

Under the shadow of thy throne
thy saints have dwelt secure;
sufficient is thine arm alone,
and our defence is sure.

Before the hills in order stood,
or earth received her frame,
from everlasting thou art God,
to endless years the same.

A thousand ages in thy sight
are like an evening gone;
short as the watch that ends the night
before the rising sun.

Time, like an ever-rolling stream,
bears all its sons away;
they fly forgotten, as a dream
dies at the opening day.

O God, our help in ages past,
our hope for years to come,
be thou our guard while troubles last,
and our eternal home.

Isaac Watts (1674–1748)

Prayer

Almighty God, as always on this day, we come solemnly. We are sad because personal memories come flooding back of those we knew and loved who are no longer in our near sight, some of whom paid the price of war. We are downcast because we know the world in which we live – the world of your making, with its people of your creating – and find it hard to imagine it ever being the way you intended. And we are regretful, and confess: there is much that we ourselves might do to end bitterness and rebuild peace, and we have left many things undone. Today, especially, we begin with a plea that all our half-heartedness might be forgiven....

God who wills peace everywhere and for all, we look to Jesus, who grew up in a land of occupation and conflict, yet taught to all the ways of love, and pray: make us like him. Enable us to set aside superficial or popular ways of judging in which we always seem to come out ahead and on top. Renew in us an enthusiasm for loving one another, friend and enemy, until there is no longer an enemy, and we see all people as men, women and children made in your image in accordance with the likeness of Christ. And rekindle in us a deep desire for peace that holds upon our lips any word about to be spoken in anger, and any deed contemplated that harms, hurts or hinders another.

Call to remembrance *(words from the Book of Common Order)*

*Let us remember the kindness of God,
and his favour to us in our time of need.*

*Let us remember the courage, devotion to duty, and self-sacrifice
of the men and women of the armed forces;
the toil, endurance and suffering of those who were not in uniform;
the support of those who sent us help from afar,
or came and stood by our side.*

*Let us remember those who were wounded in the fight;
those who perished in air-raids at home, particularly in the Clydebank blitz;
those who fell in battle, and are buried at sea or in some corner of a foreign field;
and especially those whom we have known and loved,
whose place is forever in our hearts.*

*Let us remember those who were our enemies,
those whose homes and hearts are as bereft as ours,
whose dead lie also in a living tomb of everlasting remembrance.*

*Let us remember those who came back;
those whose lives still bear the scars of war;
those who lost sight or limbs or reason;
those who lost faith in God and hope for humanity.*

*Let us remember the continuing grace of God, whose love holds all souls in life,
and to whom none are dead but all are alive forever.*

Silence

*They shall not grow old, as we that are left grow old;
age shall not weary them, not the years condemn.
At the going down of the sun, and in the morning,
we will remember them.*

Reading: Isaiah 65 verses 17 - 25

Hymn 710: "I have a dream", a man once said

1 'I have a dream', a man once said,
'where all is perfect peace ;
where men and women, black and white,
stand hand in hand, and all unite
in freedom and in love.' **(Repeat)**

2 But in this world of bitter strife
the dream can often fade ;
reality seems dark as night,
we catch but glimpses of the light
Christ sheds on humankind. **(Repeat)**

3 Fierce persecution, war, and hate
are raging everywhere ;
God calls us now to pay the price
through struggles and through sacrifice
of standing for the right. **(Repeat)**

4 So dream the dreams and sing the songs,
but never be content ;
for thoughts and words don't ease the pain :
unless there's action, all is vain ;
faith proves itself in deeds. **(Repeat)**

5 Lord, give us vision, make us strong,
help us to do your will ;
don't let us rest until we see
your love throughout humanity
uniting us in peace. **(Repeat)**

Pamela J. Pettitt (b. 1954)

Sermon

Isaiah 65 verse 25: The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox; but the serpent – its food shall be dust! They shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain, say the Lord.

Suella Braverman, appointed again to the post of Home Secretary in a government pledged by the latest Prime Minister to have integrity at its core, and just six days after resigning that same post, had already taken a bit of flak when she announced, some weeks previously, that she had a dream. Forget Martin Luther King Junior! This was tawdry. In her dream she saw a planeload of asylum seekers being banished from the UK and sent to Rwanda, not exactly famed for its amazingly good record on human rights. (Mind you, the UK's slipping down the league, too, along with a host of other countries. Maybe we just know too much). It brought Ms Braverman much ridicule, compounded by reports on conditions at Manston Detention Centre in Kent, housing, at one point, four thousand souls instead of its intended capacity of eighteen hundred. Perhaps she needs to follow the advice of Dr Michael Mosley, whose recent series on telly, *How to Sleep Well*, has had viewers thinking about how to achieve a better night's sleep.

Many of us dream. I have got a habit of doing it much more often than I used to – or, at least, of remembering the content of my dreams much more often than I used to. It all started in the anxiety-provoking atmosphere of dislocation, dismay and uncertainty created by the onset of the Covid 19 pandemic. Now, I am back to sleeping better, but I have gone from having to dream up useful, ministry-related things to fill my days, to having to figure how to get everything done in the available hours, and my dreams have got very busy. Each one is filled with several people: church events, funerals, Sunday services, all competing for resolution in my unconscious mind.

Sometimes I can remember only in part, and lie awake, trying to work out what it was all about.

But often when we dream, we're thinking of good things: jobs we might like to have, places we might like to go, ambitions we might still like to fulfil. And, as for Martin Luther King in 1960s America, our dreams are upbeat, positive, joyous, unselfish, and even global. Who would not list among their dreams some of these things: a cure for serious illnesses that plague us... a fairer world... and, especially on this Remembrance Sunday, a world at peace with itself.

I think the prophet Isaiah had many a sleepless night, concentrating all the while on the holy version of dreams, namely visions. Today we have one, on a major scale: of a new heaven and a new earth; as one writer said: *a vivid and concrete representation of a transformed environment: peoples, a place to live, and nature all woven into a complex relationship of wholeness*. If we can't engage the prospect of transformation of the world order on Remembrance Sunday, perhaps we shouldn't bother trying....

But Isaiah invites us to. His context is the possibility of restored life in Jerusalem, after 538 BC, *when the first wave of exiles who returned under Sheshbazzar, are faced with the mountainous task of rebuilding a ruined city, a ruined temple, and a ruined country of Judah*. When I read these verses last Sunday night, they couldn't have sounded more up to date, more pertinent, more needed. Here's why....

In verse 19, Isaiah's vision points to a time when God will rejoice over Jerusalem where **the sound of weeping and crying will be heard no more**. With predictable regularity, we hear of outbreaks of violence in that city and its surroundings, men,

women and children killed as Jews subdue the Palestinians as the Palestinians protest at the land grabs in which the authorities so regularly indulge, while the US and the UK politely turn their faces away and ignore it. On this Remembrance Day, I have a dream, and share Isaiah's vision, of a Jerusalem at peace with itself.

In verse 20, we hear about a vision for young and old alike. Not so long ago, the devastating Ockenden Report was released concerning failures in the care of mothers and babies, and doubtless to the devastation of all, including fathers, at the Shrewsbury and Telford NHS Trust, finding that two hundred-and-one babies, and nine mothers, had died there, over many years, due to deficiencies in maternity care. According to Isaiah, there will none of that in the new order. **Never again**, he says, **will there be in it an infant who lives but a few days.** A fair and medically top class start for all our mums and babies (and dads)? On Remembrance Day, who wouldn't dream of a great start for all our wee ones? Isn't that part of that "land fit for heroes" thing? Heroes, and their children, grandchildren and great grandchildren?

And to make sure older folk are not overlooked, missed out, dismissed, or forgotten, Isaiah continues in the same verse: **Never again will there be in it (the city) an old man who does not live out his years; the one who dies at a hundred will be thought a mere child.** Just as every few weeks there seems to be a report on maternity care or children's services failures, so every few weeks it seems we hear news of poor care, in care homes or in the community, of our elderly folk. In the new heaven and the new earth, they, too, will get a good deal. That would have to include, of course, those veterans of all our wars whom the UK, having sent off to fight, has destined to rely on charity. Did we think of that when we pinned on our poppy, I wonder...

Isaiah ploughs on. Verse 21 could not be more up to the minute. There's talk of people building houses and dwelling in them. Right now, folk are thinking about not being able to live in their homes as they can't afford an escalating mortgage, and, if they can, they maybe can't also heat them. **No longer**, the mighty man of God repeats, **will they build houses and others live in them.** Alongside this there is mention of planting vineyards and eating the fruit, rather than planting crops for others to eat. Climate change coming to mind anyone? ... Global warming is a result of our insatiable appetite for things, for travel, for comfort, for security, no matter who pays the price. Maybe, when Isaiah's vision comes to pass, we won't all jump in the

car to go round the corner to buy our favourite veg and fruit, way out of season, and to serve it up, in our very warm homes, before tossing any leftovers into the caddy for food waste food recycling. And no, I'm not moralising, I'm confessing...

Verse 22 has a resonance with the situation in Ukraine, and countless other places round the world those names it somehow seems not quite so fashionable to recall. Our prophet says this: **They will not labour in vain, nor will they bear children doomed to misfortune.** The women of Iran, anyone? Or protesters in China? The starving in East Africa and Yemen? Those living on the margins in Pakistan and Bangladesh? And thousands and thousands of our citizens at home, destined, with their children, to live in an endless cycle of poverty: foodbanks, debt, and cold homes, despite, in many cases, a parent doing two or three jobs.

Near the end of our reading, Isaiah, continuing to let God speak, puts different, but just as important, words on to the lips of God. They're these: **Before they call, I will answer; while they are still speaking, I will hear.** How can that possibly ever be, we ask. How can God be hearing and answering when the old order still persists, and the vision remains no more than that: a vision? Well, at this point I invite you to do what we may always do, even when a passage from the Old Testament is set before us: think of Jesus. Think of Jesus this Remembrance Day, and remember not just his promises, but his invitation to participate in them and make them a reality. As ever on Remembrance Day, we are not off the hook. Nostalgia by itself will not cut it. Isaiah even has the audacity to have God say as the vision begins: **See, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind.** Jesus would have us do something more, something better, something more constructive. And the good news is that we already know what these things are. That cup of water given, that meal shared, that handshake offered in forgiveness and reconciliation, that raising of our voice for justice on another's behalf, that small, almost unnoticed act that builds another's dignity, that visit to a fellow member in a care home, that loudly proclaims: you are not forgotten. All these matter.

Jesus doesn't want us hanging around this Remembrance Sunday, hands piously folded, poppies on show, heads solemnly bowed, silence observed, broken at the end by the bugle's clear and haunting notes. All have their place. But neither Isaiah in his time nor Jesus in his and ours wants us to think simply of newness and resurrection

just in the future and in the everlasting. Resurrection has to be promised, proclaimed, lived now. On this Remembrance Sunday, as wars continue to be fought in countries without number, and as world leaders step on and off their global warming jets at COP27 in Sharm el Sheikh, and people across the world starve, lose their land, and watch their children die, the church of the Lord Jesus Christ – that's us – will have to have something more to say than just "remember". Isaiah shares his mighty vision this Remembrance Day in the middle of COP 27, and, for the sake of us all, every living thing, God invites us to participate, and Jesus himself shows us the way.

Hymn 715: Behold! the mountain of the Lord

1 Behold! the mountain of the Lord
in latter days shall rise
on mountain tops above the hills,
and draw the wondering eyes.

2 To this the joyful nations round,
all tribes and tongues, shall flow;
up to the hill of God, they'll say,
and to his house we'll go.

3 The beam that shines from Zion hill
shall lighten every land;
the King who reigns in Salem's towers
shall all the world command.

4 Among the nations he shall judge;
his judgements truth shall guide;
his sceptre shall protect the just,
and quell the sinner's pride.

5 No strife shall rage, nor hostile feuds
disturb those peaceful years;
to ploughshares men shall beat their
swords,
to pruning-hooks their spears.

6 No longer hosts, encountering hosts,
shall crowds of slain deplore:
they hang the trumpet in the hall,
and study war no more.

7 Come then, O house of Jacob! come
to worship at his shrine;
and, walking in the light of God,
with holy beauties shine.

Scottish Paraphrases, 1781
Isaiah 2: 2-5

Offering

Prayer

Living God, who in every age offers endless opportunities - to recognise shortcomings, to confess, to receive forgiveness, and then to embrace new, abundant and endless hope for the future - we come on this Remembrance Day intent on remembering, reconciling, and recreating possibilities for peace, justice and compassion, not only on our doorstep, but across the world and to its people in every corner. So, we pray, make us ready for this quiet but momentous work: help us to recognise the grudges we harbour, the prejudices we nurse, the anger that simmers when things do not go

our way.... And now, confronting them, we determine, with your help, to set them aside, and make room in our hearts for bigger love.

Loving God, we pray for all who suffer now because of conflict: for those whose lives are forever governed by injuries sustained in war, and for those who grieve because of it. Silently we remember any known to us and pray especially for them.... We pray for those who live their lives in terror, as factions fight within the borders of their own countries. May those in government redouble their efforts for harmony. And we pray for all the war-torn places and places where tensions simmer: Yemen, Syria, Ukraine, countries across Africa, and Israel Palestine, and for their citizens, that no-one within their borders may be content until peace is established and enjoyed by all.

God of light, expose our own lives to the light of your truth, we that might see every single way in which we might bring justice to those without it and compassion to those who weary for the lack of it. Trouble us greatly about the complacency we embrace and the self-satisfaction we allow ourselves and give us no rest until we are living from minute to minute in the delightfully kind and generous ways of Jesus, who came bringing both sword and peace. Amen.

Hymn: Monarch and maker of all time and space

1 Monarch and maker of all time and space,
sculptor of mountain and of desert place,
source and sustainer of both sea and land,
all that exists was crafted by your hand.

2 Yours are the myriad stars and cosmic
grace,
yours is the image in each human face;
history and mystery in all that we know,
yours is the love through which we love and
grow.

3 Help us as guardians of all life on earth
both to respect the world and prize its
worth;
and, in deep gratitude for all you give,
turn greed to sharing so that all may live.

4 Glory to God to whom, all praise is due,
glory to Jesus making all things new,
glory to God the spirit, bold and bright,
who leads the world through darkness into
light.

©Words by John Bell (b 1949)

Benediction

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you and all those whom you love. Now and always.

Amen.

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