

Remembrance Sunday 2008, St Giles Church

Sermon by Peter Pine-Coffin

As we gather here today for this service of remembrance, we will have different feelings, moods and thoughts, which gives us a very personal approach to our worship.

There are many more feelings too, but there is no need for me to list them here today.

Of course we remember those who have paid the supreme sacrifice, including women and yes, children, no less than 28, and four teachers, including the headmaster in Petworth School in 1942.

We also remember the disabled from various wars and those who suffer to this day.

King George VI wrote on 8th June 1946 to all boys and girls at school. This is the letter.

He said they had shared in the hardships and dangers of total war, as well as in the triumph of the allied nations.

He continued by telling the children that he knew they would be proud to belong to a country of such supreme effort, proud too of parents, family and others, who by their courage, endurance and enterprise had brought victory.

He concluded his letter by hoping those qualities would be theirs too when they grew up. He also hoped they would join in the common effort to establish unity and peace throughout the world, one of our two aims behind the meaning of this Sunday.

What better way could the thoughts of each and every one of us be summed up. Sadly we must heed the words of one John McRae:

I quote:

“In Flanders fields the poppies blow
between the crosses, row on row,
That mark our place.”

He concludes

“Take up our quarrel with the foe:
To you from failing hands we throw
The torch; be yours to hold it high.
If you break faith with us who die,
We shall not sleep though poppies grow
in Flanders fields”.

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I did say I would not mention a list of the thoughts with us today. Suffice it just for me to add maybe pain, pride and sadness. Thus on this day, many of us are confronted with some tricky personal thoughts and memories. Hopefully some union may be achieved in our worship which will help us to find peace of mind.

Why does conflict come about? Perhaps if we can understand that question, mankind might find better solutions to avoid it in the future. After all, negotiation is far preferable to the gun.

St. James, in his epistle, asks at the beginning of Chapter 4

“What causes fights and quarrels among you?”

Then he answers his own question:

“Don’t they come from your desires that battle within you?” - suggesting the human heart.

Of course it would be flying in the face of history and the plainest of facts to deny political greed and economic conditions were yet other causes amongst many.

James wasn’t denying this, but merely suggesting they were secondary causes, the primary causes lay elsewhere.

He mentions warring, be it personal or international, and says “desires that battle within us”. Really he is telling us the problem lies within us, the individual.

There are those who blame religion or even the devil, no matter what the cause or the reason. Fighting lies within us and there it must be contained.

So when we think a little more about armistice, the question “can we make a difference?” must arise.

Listen to the mood of the people they say, those who preach against war cannot be ignored. It is the voices of the ordinary men and women who count, especially at election time.

The way forward is with love not hate, forgiveness not revenge, and peace not war.

Today, pride and pain walk hand in hand. We wouldn’t be truly human if we didn’t remember with pain, nor would we be good citizens if we were to forget

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pride. These two meet with passion and today is very much a part of passion.

So let us bring ourselves to God, quietly, thoughtfully and hopefully. Let us give our thoughts, pain, anxieties and bereavements to him and ask him to use them all to help bring reconciliation for all nations of the world.

So, in conclusion, let us return to the final remembrance, for which this Sunday is set aside, and I would like to quote the ultimate verse of a poem entitled *My Unknown Soldier* by Laura McLintic.

She is explaining how, on the Flanders battle field, she placed a cross on one of the 11,908 graves in front of her. She selected one at random and wrote:

"Many men have crosses or wreaths about their stone.
I place my simple cross so you'll never be alone.
So thank you unknown soldier, my comfort and my friend.
You will be my continuity until my life is at an end".

At the going down of the sun and in the morning we will remember them.