

## Remembrance Sunday

8am Holy Communion in the Cathedral

11am Choral Mattins at the Lord Mayor's Chapel

Colossians 1.3-12, Matthew 9.18-26 (Book of Common Prayer readings for the 24<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity)

Canon Neil Patterson, Vice-Dean

We gather each year on Remembrance Sunday, of course, to remember the impact on this nation and the world of the two World Wars, and to remember with honour those who fought and died in the cause of freedom and peace, and you will almost certainly have done so many times with the appropriate words and silence. When I was first ordained twenty years ago, older clergy told me they had expected Remembrance to die out as the direct memories of the World Wars passed, as for most of us they now have, into history. But in reality the conflicts of quite recent times, in Iraq and Afghanistan especially, with their new sad roll of the honoured dead, brought it all back, and I have always found that it meets an important need. And though the act of remembrance is universal, in church we are enabled to hold the pain of the past in the redeeming light of Christ, offering hope of a better future.

However, as well as remembering, it seems to me that speaking on Remembrance Sunday carries some need to reflect on the state of the world, and I trust you will not be too surprised by my doing so. When I was a child, about the late 1980s, I can recall surprising my contemporaries and teachers with my assertion that, alas, I expected to see another world war in my lifetime. It was, looking back, an innocent extrapolation – I think I must have recently learnt about the First and Second World Wars, and I knew about the Napoleonic Wars and others before, and it must have seemed that it was just what happened in the world – and I had little understanding of the depth of horror and destruction that war brings. But the shock I provoked made me realise that most people did not expect to see world war again. Perhaps this was because they had faith in the international order to prevent it, and also (though I do not remember this being so much spoken of as it may have been in some of your childhoods further back) they felt that nuclear weapons had made general war unthinkable.

When I studied international relations as part of my degree, I was heartened to discover a stronger argument for world war being unlikely – so called “democratic peace theory.” This is the argument that democracies never go to war with other democracies, and it seemed to hold true. Autocratic or communist states go to war, and sometimes democratic states have gone to war with autocracies, as in the Second World War or, less happily, the United States in Vietnam or Iraq. But, the argument is, war is such a discouraging thing for a democratic government to do – because your own boys get killed, and people don't vote for you afterwards – that the incentives to peace are strong enough. That was the late 1990s, when, in retrospect, the world seemed to be in quite a cheerful place after the fall of communism.

Today, on the other hand, it seems to me that the world may look more unsafe than it has at any point in my lifetime, perhaps any point in any of our lifetimes, though I would be happy to accept the early years of the Cold War as worse. And that is a situation only made a little worse by the election result in

the United States this week. The Russian invasion of Ukraine and strained the democratic peace theory to the limit, for although we doubt Russian elections are entirely free and fair, Putin was elected and probably is popular with a majority of his people. But the conflict between Israel and Lebanon knocks it down entirely. And behind all the world's conflicts are the pressures created by overpopulation and the climate emergency, neither of which are going away any time soon. Truly, our prayers for peace are needed.

Often on Remembrance Sunday we have set some short text that speaks of the peace of God, on which one may hang a general sermon about the desirability of peace- which is all very well, but maybe sometimes not very interesting. Here we have the readings for the 24<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity from the Book of Common Prayer, chosen with no thought of Remembrance Sunday, but I think the Gospel reading in particular has something to say to us. A ruler (named as Jairus in Luke's gospel) seeks healing for his daughter, and a woman, not named, for herself. There is an odd symmetry between the years of the woman's haemorrhage and the girl's age. But, fundamentally, both were in need of healing – like our world itself. Healing from the pain passed on from generation to generation of the bloodshed and destruction of war. Healing of the harm we are doing to the natural world. Healing of memory.

And they turn to Jesus because they know he can heal – that was the reputation he went around with, in a world where miracle-working healing was understood to be an occasional gift found in a person, and not in itself unique to Jesus, even though we know the stories of his healings better than any others. But they show little understanding of truly understanding *why* he could heal, and perhaps even for us that is a bit of a mystery. Was the divine life in him able to heal anything? Yes, though in fact he did not. In part, I suggest, his healing is really linked to the Cross, for it is only the one who suffered to redeem the whole world who can touch its sufferings.

But there is something more. In reaching for Jesus, however unwittingly, they reached for the author of life itself, and so for the life of all people. And it is only that perspective that can truly lift us from a world of war. The tragedy of war is that it pits peoples against one another who cannot truly see the other as people, and we see and hear it every day. Governments and propagandists paint the enemy they are fighting as terrorists, or 'Nazis' or monsters of some sort. But in the eyes of God, no-one is truly that. All are beloved children, however sometimes astray. All are worthy of love.

So as this Remembrance Sunday we revisit the memories of sacrifice and service, and renew our commitment to maintain and build a world of peace, we ask God, with heartfelt prayers, to help us see as he sees. To see the world, perhaps, as Gaia hangs in the Cathedral, complete and without the boundaries made by human sin, and in which all, however awful their actions and words, are known and loved by God.