

Sunday 12 November – Remembrance Sunday

Sermon by Christine Newmarch

An audio recording of the sermon will be available after the service at [Sermons \(tk-tiptree-braxted-benefice.org.uk\)](https://www.tiptree-braxted-benefice.org.uk/Sermons)

Remembrance Sunday brings back memories and emotions of all kinds, even for those of us with no direct or family connections to the armed services. The solemnity of remembrance services and parades, the annual TV broadcasts of the Festival of Remembrance from the Royal Albert Hall, and the services at the Cenotaph are part of our national psyche.

Of course, Remembrance Sunday has a far deeper resonance for those who have served their country in conflict or peace time, and rightly so.

My earliest memory of Remembrance Sunday goes back to my early childhood. I suddenly became aware that my mother would not speak to me, or answer questions, but was ignoring me. This had never happened before quite like this. It was a strange and frightening experience. It can only have lasted for two minutes, but it seemed a long time before she spoke again and explained it was a special occasion to remember people who had died in war. I must have been very young, not much more than a toddler, and of course, I was still confused.

We lived in West Kensington, close enough in those quieter times to hear Royal Gun Salutes sounding out across London on various state occasions, and it was often a Sunday afternoon treat to peer through the railings to look at the horses at Knightsbridge barracks – that was before the redevelopment which now hides the horses and everything else from public view.

Remembrance remains important: not only for those with personal memories, but so that all generations can grasp something of the sacrifices of others.

Recent national events – the funeral of Queen Elizabeth II and the Coronation of King Charles III - have demonstrated the ceremonial abilities as well as the national security importance of our armed forces. Their discipline, self-control and precision won much admiration at home and abroad.

Some aspects of military service may be too often glamourised in films and on TV, yet even so, series such as Strike Back, Band of Brothers, Army Wives and Our Girl capture some of the personal suffering and waste it entails.

However, it is in the final scene in the very last episode of *Blackadder Goes Forth*, where we see, in slow motion, the characters going to their deaths ‘over the top’ from their trench on the Western Front. It was first broadcast in November 1989, but remains an often repeated and poignant act of remembrance.

The Remembrance season honours those who served and those who continue to serve to defend our democratic freedoms and way of life. It does not glorify war, far from it, but draws the nation together both in gratitude and hope for a peaceful future.

We need hope, because right now there is so little peace and so much suffering in the world: wars and conflicts, extremism, persecution, terrorism, disasters of all kinds, disease, injustice, poverty and uncertainty.

The post-war period from the end of WWII in 1945 has been termed the Long Peace or the Pax Americana, but this is largely illusory for there have only been 26 days – yes, days, not weeks, months or years – days when there has been anything like real peace in the world.

The brutality of today’s conflict in Israel-Palestine is shocking, not least because of the detailed reporting and video footage we see. We know that the roots of the conflict are deep and complex, as they are in the many other wars and disputes around the world including Ukraine, Syria, Yemen, Afghanistan, South Sudan and Columbia.

These conflicts are a reminder that we should never be complacent or take peace for granted.

As Christians we believe our hope is found in God, and the reconciliation of the world to Him through the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The parable of the 10 bridesmaids can seem harsh and be difficult for us to hear. It is about waiting, and waiting for Jesus, the bridegroom, to come.

In the parable, the bridesmaids who were running out of oil had not given up waiting, but were ill-prepared. They were shut out of the wedding banquet. It was their lack of care, lack of preparedness, complacency even, which was their undoing.

The Thessalonians were eagerly waiting for Jesus' return, and in his letter, Paul is telling them not to worry whether they live to see it in the flesh as when Jesus returns, he will raise his faithful ones from death before those who are still living on earth. Paul was encouraging the Thessalonians not to grieve but to live in hope that all who believe will be raised when Jesus returns. That hope, that promise is still ours today.

As we continue our remembrance of those who have given all in the long-standing quest for peace, for the values of God's kingdom, let us also remember to pray for God's help, his urgent assistance in turning those who would use violence towards peace, and to bring health and healing to this broken world.

This morning's Psalm is No 70. It opens:

'Be pleased, O God, to deliver me.

O Lord, make haste to help me!'

and it closes with the words:

'I am poor and needy; hasten to me, O God!

You are my help and my deliverer;

O Lord, do not delay!'

These are urgent cries for God's help. Yes, we believe that we shall be caught up to be with the Lord for ever at his second coming, but we still need God's help in the here and now of everyday life. In difficult times – and these certainly are difficult times - prayer can be difficult, faith a little wobbly even, but God loves us and understands our frustrations and fears.

Just as the Philippians did not know when Jesus would return, neither can we. We do not know when or from which direction he will come, but we know the world needs him now. To pray for God's help is to be ready to meet him, for him to know us and save us.

Do not, O Lord, withhold your mercy from us; let your steadfast love and your faithfulness keep us safe for ever. Amen.