

Sunday 9 November – Remembrance Sunday

Sermon by Rev'd Becca Rogers, Associate Priest at Victoria Docks Ascension and Racial Justice Advocate for the Newham Deanery

As it is café church at St. Luke's there is no sermon from there this week, but the sermon from Chelmsford cathedral can be viewed at [Weekly Sermons from the Diocese of Chelmsford](#) and a transcript of it is reproduced below.

This lent, at our church, we went through a book called 'The ruthless elimination of hurry'.

It's a great read, which points out gently but with challenge just how readily today, we fill our lives and our minds. We love to be busy and almost find meaning and value in that. In those times when we are resting, there's an ever-available stream of news, entertainment and online connection which fills even our down time if we're not careful. The book is a caution that if we do not embrace the biblical practices of sabbath, slowing, silence and solitude, we are cutting off our connection with ourselves, with other people and ultimately, with God.

Remembrance Sunday is really rare, as it's a time when corporately we are called to silence. At 11.00 silence descends. It is noticeable because it is so different. Many times, it can feel almost awkward at first. The silence is announced, and we start to notice the sound of shuffling or coughing, babies making noises and parents saying shush. But then somehow, through that, something poignant happens and with that space comes the opportunity to engage with something very significant and deep.

As a child I remember using that silence to think about my Great Uncle Norman, my Grandma's brother who was killed aged 23 in the Second World War. I never met him but was always told that I looked like him. Thinking of Norman felt important and was a personal connection to the call to remember.

Often, we may use the silence to remember those we have no connection with personally, but who, willingly or otherwise, made unimaginable sacrifices, the effects of which we still know today. Falling silent to remember, to honour, to grieve what they what they went through is so

much more powerful, because there never really will be the very right words.

St John of the cross said, 'God's first language is silence'. Silence enables us to open up our hearts to what God might be saying to us, it enables us to open ourselves up to Him and to allow Him to change us. Silence and stillness also creates space for others. Love cannot be practised in a hurry.

As we think about our Psalm on this remembrance Sunday, it reminds us of how we might really listen to the voices of those caught up in war today. The words of Psalm 17 could be the prayer of someone in Sudan, Gaza, Ukraine or elsewhere.

'Hear me Lord, my plea is just; listen to my cry
Hear my prayer- it does not rise from deceitful lips.

Let my vindication come from you;

Keep me as the apple of your eye;
Hide me in the shadow of your wings

From the wicked who are out to destroy me,
From my mortal enemies who surround me'.

What if, instead of rushing on to the next item, we were to really sit with these words, to meditate on them, to hear them as though spoken by our brothers and sisters suffering today? Surely, that would be to engage with them and with God in an important way.

And so too as we engage with the hope that is found in our gospel reading today. In his discussion of marriage and the resurrection Jesus declares just how different reality will be in the resurrection. He speaks of God's children being resurrected to new life, being like angels. He declares 'God is not the God of the dead but of the living, to Him all are alive'. These are words of hope which speak to us about those we remember, and those who are suffering today. They are words of hope which the world truly needs, and which have the power to change us and be a help to others. But we do not grab them and rush away. We sit, in the quiet and allow God to transform us from the inside out with His hope, so that we are changed, and so that we have something real to offer this broken world.

This Remembrance Sunday let us be encouraged to take this familiar ritual of silence and model more of our lives on it. To remember, to reflect, to

hear the voices we need to hear, those of other people and most importantly, to hear God. May we allow ourselves to be broken by the pain of the past and the present, and through that, to also be transformed by the hope which the resurrection brings.

Amen.

Café church talk from St. Luke's – Wendy Borgartz

This season in the church calendar is called the time of Remembrance – last Sunday we remembered all the saints, we held our memorial service last Sunday afternoon for those who had lost loved ones in the past year and whose funerals our Ministry Team conducted, on Thursday we remembered all those loved ones who have gone before and whose names had been entered on the list for remembrance, then today we have Remembrance Sunday.

Remembrance Sunday is a day many people find difficult. For those who have served in one or other of the armed forces or who have loved ones who have served, they have people they can remember. But for many of us, now that we are 80 years past the end of the Second World War, we have no direct memory to remember. Some of you may have been children during that war, like my mother – but children do not fully comprehend war in the way adults do. One of my mother's memories is of going to a party at one of the local American airbases and having ice cream for the first time – that is the sort of memory a child will carry with them.

For our children nowadays, it is much the same as when I was a child. We were not there, so what can we remember? I don't even have much memory of the Falklands War as I was away in the USSR for all of it, all I can really remember is the Soviet news reporting, quite seriously, on at least 3 occasions that HMS Invincible, the aircraft carrier, had been sunk – I never quite worked out how they could report a ship sinking more than once and expect to be believed. But other more recent conflicts, the horrors of Bosnia, Iraq, Afghanistan were closer to home, although I did not actually know anyone who had suffered a loss through those wars.

But this is getting it wrong, because remembering and memory are not about the same thing. For some people, of course, Remembrance Day is about personal memory, people for whom active war service is an important part of who they are – those who have given of themselves to

serve their nation – those who recall colleagues alongside whom they fought, some of whom did not survive – who gave their lives in the cause of freedom and right. The ones whose memory we honour today.

So, what is remembering then? Perhaps we need to break the word up into parts – re-mem-bering – re to do again and member meaning putting back together the separated bits. Perhaps then we can make a whole that can say something to us here and now. If we take the two world wars, because of the enormous scale of the events there are literally millions of fragments to put back together; to re-member. When we do put them back together we get an affirmation that, at all costs, evil must never be allowed to triumph in the affairs of nations, that we must hold fast to the truth that God has not created some races and people superior to others, and that fighting for these values is immensely costly in terms of human life. Remembrance Day points on the one hand to thanksgiving for those who suffered and died in that cause, and on the other hand to a renewal of our own resolve to overcome evil in the world.

If we stop remembering, we are in danger of forgetting those basic values and ignoring the need to learn from history and from the mistakes of the past. The point of remembering is to be better fitted for living in the present, and that includes the many wars and conflicts we see around us nowadays, including war once again on our doorstep in Europe

The whole Christian faith is about ‘re-mem-bering’, about putting together the pieces, and has been for the past 2,000 years. The first Christians had the advantage that, for them, remembering involved their own personal memories. Without them we would not have a record of the pieces of the puzzle: a first-hand experience of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus as recorded in the Gospels. Down the centuries people have assembled the bits to create a whole picture – a picture that is not fixed for all time, but which changes and develops as new experiences, insights and memories are added as the Holy Spirit continues to work in the world and shows something real for the present, as well as giving us that hope for the future when Jesus returns and God re-makes His creation, into the new heaven and the new earth. As our reading from Luke’s Gospel tells us, our resurrection lives will be different but will be full of that new life, because Jesus is the Lord of the living, not of the dead.

So, just as Remembrance Day is about remembering the past in order to live in the present, so is our faith. Our Christian remembering helps us build on the foundations of our historic faith so we can live our lives today knowing the presence of God, the hope for the future with Jesus, and with the power of the Holy Spirit to inform our actions in the here and now. Remembering as Christians is why we re-read our Scriptures and revisit the seasons and Christian festivals. Each time we revisit them we each bring another year's experience of Christian living to our remembrance.

On this Remembrance Sunday, we recall those who died in the service of their nation, and we give thanks for them: for their courage and dedication, and for their legacy – the peace and freedom we enjoy, the good relations with our allies – but which we know is so fragile. Likewise, when we share the bread and wine together in the Eucharist, we recall that the life, the peace, the freedom and the future hope that Jesus offers each one of us was also won at a price – the price of his own life as he died for our sake on the cross.

Remembering matters, if we are to live in the present with an eye to the experience of the past. May God, through his Holy Spirit, give us the wisdom we need to interpret our remembering and to live according to his mind and will. Amen.