



Sermon Remembrance Sunday at Brecon Cathedral

Sunday 10 November 2014 at 11.30am

The Very Revd Dr Paul Shackerley

Dean of Brecon

Today we meet because pride and pain are weaved today. Remembrance Sunday challenges us by interrupting our comfortable lives in a powerfully symbolic way that the media coverage of war cannot.¹ As the words of the hymn we have just sung poetically puts it, 'May this remembrance move our hearts to build a peace enduring, and a hope fulfilled, when every flag of tyranny is furled and wars at last shall cease in all the world'. **The two feelings coexist in stark reality for us, pride and pain, and we are shaken by the interruption into our comfortable lives.** Yet, Remembrance Sunday cannot just be about the value we place on the dead (as important and necessary as this is). Remembrance Sunday must also communicate what we value about living and loving. We meet in this Cathedral then, not simply to remember the dead, but what they did when they lived to secure freedom and peace. If we remember the dead only, then our remembering is futile and left in the dusty grave of human history that has failed to teach us how to live in harmony. We gather as an expression of loving and our fortitude to our generation and future generations, that we want peace for all. We meet to show our resolve to work for peace not annihilation; to pray for the injured and their loved ones, so the words from the first verse of the hymn is rehearsed in our daily endeavours to secure peace that, our 'hearts are open, all our longings known' for the gift of peace.²

Our endeavour as human beings is to experience the small expressions of love, and God is the source of our loving. Remembrance Sunday is a reminder that we must preserve a check on what the world of conflict and war that could potentially turn us into tyrants of war if we focus on war rather than peace, love and justice. The silence we experience at the Cenotaph touches the deep yearning of love, as well as loss. Like others across the world, the silence and deep yearning of love can be an uncomfortable silence for us. As the survivor of Auschwitz, Rabbi Hugo Gryn, wrote, 'the goal of memory is love. To abide in love.' **The pain and pride coexist – weaved together, and we are shaken by the interruption into our comfortable lives.**

¹ Attributed to Rowan Williams 2007, <http://rowanwilliams.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/1388/new-national-armed-forces-memorial-to-make-the-invisible-visible#sthash.vioBxaRu.dpuf> [Accessed by The Dean of Brecon 06 November 2014].

² O Valiant Hearts, who to your glory came, *The Supreme Sacrifice*, The Reverend C Harris DD 1836 – 1911, John Stanhope Arkwright 1872 – 1954.



On 09 October 2010, I was in Wales to say 'goodbye' to my 22 year old cousin, who went to Afghanistan on 16 October. Before I left to drive back to Doncaster that night, he gave me a lasting and tight hug and whispered so that his mother would not overhear, 'if I don't come back alive, or come back in bits, or if they fill my coffin with earth because there is not much left of me, will you to do my funeral.' I was so moved by the intensity of that encounter that I committed to write a bluey to him every week for six months until he came home. Our letters connected us to each other's lives, catching mere glimpses into a different realities. Let me read you a few lines from his bluey dated 20 October..... **The pain and pride coexist, and we are shaken by the interruption into our comfortable lives.**

We have all been exposed to the huge aircraft bulk looming over tiny coffins, draped with the Union Flag, as a soldier's coffin is carried out of a transport plane on to the airport tarmac, and the waiting officers and chaplains giving a lonely coffin a powerful dignity, images of the 'hopeless, never-shifting burden of war.' They are poignant scenes we dread for our forces personnel and their families.

So, we must dare ourselves to do our remembering in a sacred place like this Cathedral, at least once a year, in this echo chamber of praise, because it breathes life and hope for our future. Because God's eternal love and peace must pierce through to the deepest hopes and longing of the human heart. We must never give up on this, or we are lost. We are called to abide in this eternal love, a love shown when Christ sacrificed his life on the cross. It was not sin that took Christ to the Cross, but love. When he stretched his hands on the cross, he embraced both the dead and the living, with love.

Yes, of course, today our remembering leak the horrors of war and pain, for a short time. Yet, for many, there is no respite from remembering, and the horror lives on in their minds that disfigures them. Remembering punctures into our comfortable and ordered lives, as Remembrance Sunday always will – and so it should. We are uncomfortable because the fragility of our world, amidst the threat of attack and conflict, pain and pride coexisting, are shaken by the interruption into our comfortable lives.

This day of pride and pain, of reflecting on how the wars of today are shaping our lives, can bring paralysing memories for those who have fought wars. Those of us who remember at a distance, not having fought, can only begin to acknowledging pain and loss that shakes our comfort-zone. And, when we are shaken, grief and compassion can flow in and find their rightful place in our lives as a response for them. In this sense, together, as God's created beings, we share a common humanity and a longing for peace.



And so, Remembrance Day is one day for our longing for love and peace to take a fresh hold on us, to release us from an anaesthesia of the realities and impact of violence and war.

For these few hours on Remembrance Sunday we hesitantly give ourselves permission to ponder the impact of violence against nations and terrors. Yet, we cannot leave it there. In this sacred space, where God is praised, we must think afresh about the purpose of remembering. And that purpose is to learn to love and seek justice and peace. These are qualities that are born from God's own costly sacrifice on the cross. Love, justice and peace must always be the intentions of Remembrance Sunday, because violence and death will not have the last word. No enemy will destroy love. Meanwhile, we must live with **pain and pride, and be shaken by the interruptions into our comfortable lives.**

If we are looking for leadership by the powerful decision makers, we do well to read the Micah Mandate, part of which Major Matthews read this morning. Micah combined his conservative commitment to the old ways, with a radical counter-cultural dissent. Micah spoke to the political and military threats in Israel and Judah. He spoke to the people in power and called them to change, to use their power in ways to work in the interests of those they served. He understood the political structures. And, when he spoke, he was brutally blunt and straight talking. Yet, above all else, he was a prophet of healing. He didn't simply critique; he offered a recipe for transformation. He didn't offer more religiosity. He didn't want more sacrifices. He didn't offer more charitable giving. No. His recipe is summed up in Micah 6.8; to **'do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with your God'**. Out of our intention to love, come national transformation, kindness, healing and, justice. In the end, it was the faithful handful who kept hope alive in Micah's day. They hoped, loved, prayed, and worked for peace and justice. This is the best hope for peace in our world.

For Christians, the divine gift is seen most clearly in the love shown by Jesus Christ, who sacrificed his life because he loved. Our Christian pathway is to do all we can to make visible the unimaginable and costly love and peace of God. We must never give up on the Micah Mandate of hope to challenge our leaders in the next election, to 'do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly...' with God that we may serve others better.

AMEN

