

Remembrance Sunday, 8th November 2020

Amos 5:18-24

¹⁸Alas for you who desire the day of the Lord! Why do you want the day of the Lord? It is darkness, not light; ¹⁹as if someone fled from a lion, and was met by a bear; or went into the house and rested a hand against the wall, and was bitten by a snake. ²⁰Is not the day of the Lord darkness, not light, and gloom with no brightness in it?

²¹I hate, I despise your festivals, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. ²²Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; and the offerings of well-being of your fatted animals I will not look upon. ²³Take away from me the noise of your songs; I will not listen to the melody of your harps. ²⁴But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an everflowing stream.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-end

¹³But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about those who have died, so that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. ¹⁴For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have died. ¹⁵For this we declare to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will by no means precede those who have died. ¹⁶For the Lord himself, with a cry of command, with the archangel's call and with the sound of God's trumpet, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air; and so we will be with the Lord forever. ¹⁸Therefore encourage one another with these words.

Matthew 25:1-13

²⁵"Then the kingdom of heaven will be like this. Ten bridesmaids took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. ²Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. ³When the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them; ⁴but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. ⁵As the bridegroom was delayed, all of them became drowsy and slept. ⁶But at midnight there was a shout, 'Look! Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.' ⁷Then all those bridesmaids got up and trimmed their lamps. ⁸The foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' ⁹But the wise replied, 'No! there will not be enough for you and for us; you had better go to the dealers and buy some for yourselves.' ¹⁰And while they went to buy it, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went with him into the wedding banquet; and the door was shut. ¹¹Later the other bridesmaids came also, saying, 'Lord, lord, open to us.' ¹²But he replied, 'Truly I tell you, I do not know you.' ¹³Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

Sermon by Reverend Sara Davies (assistant Curate)

We've all understood that this year has been unlike any other that most of us have known. Uncertainty continues as to how our lives will be over the coming weeks, and whether we will be able to meet family at Christmas.

But what about our Remembrance Services? Is this how you commemorated Remembrance Sunday last year, at home watching an online service from your local church, or reading a printed sermon? Would you have even realised that you could do this? I confess that I didn't even know that laptops incorporated recording facilities within them, I'd never needed to know.

Do we need to physically gather with others in order to remember those who have gone before us, and acknowledge the sacrifices made by so many that we might live in freedom? Does knowing that others, who we can't necessarily see, are sharing the same service or words as us, make us feel a part of something bigger? I was recently moved to see a photograph come up on a Facebook feed of a mother hugging her son, on leave from the First World War. They were probably similar ages to my own son and I, and he is also currently waiting to join the Armed Forces, I felt a connection.

We may have felt lonely during lockdown but we will have all had some form of communication from telephone to high speed computer, to keep us in touch with what is going on in the world, as well as family and friends.

Let us spend a few minutes thinking of our own relatives, living through the two World Wars. In the First World War, people certainly didn't know what they were signing up for, there was celebration as the first troops left home, thinking it would all be over by Christmas. Of course, it wasn't. Being together would have brought comfort and support, especially for those in the Pals Battalions, but would have made separation through death even more difficult.

Physical letters and parcels from home were looked forward to by those serving, but may have been dreaded by those at home when they involved notification of death or return of personal effects. Communication was difficult for all concerned, imagine not seeing those you loved for several years, as happened to a couple of people that I have known.

Whilst communication may have been much better in more recent conflicts, I can still remember lying on a bunk bed in the dark, listening to a tiny transistor radio during the Falklands Conflict. I was on night duty in a Care Home at the start of the First Gulf War, listening to another radio, and another time of darkness, especially as my husband had just joined the RAF. I felt fear and uncertainty which would return when my husband flew to Bosnia and spent months in Afghanistan amongst other places. Many forces partners have had far worse experiences than these. In later years, my husband was even able to ring me whilst he was away; nowadays it's Facetime with us being able to see each other.

Remembrance is part of the very fibre of our Christian being, as well as being a vital part of our shared human experience. In remembering all that others have done and given by their courage, their witness and their lives, we celebrate the gifts that we now enjoy and treasure, gifts of freedom, justice, peace and truth. The past that we remember allows us to value even more deeply the present in which we live, a present which has enabled technology to evolve and keep us together even when we are physically apart.

This morning's reading from 1 Thessalonians reminds us of the earliest way of communicating, through letter. This was how St Paul kept in touch with the churches that he had established around the Mediterranean. The Thessalonian's were wondering why many of their fellow believers had died, and what would happen to them when Christ returned. St Paul wanted the Thessalonians to understand that death is not the end of the story. When Christ returns, all believers, those dead and alive, will be reunited, never to suffer or die again. St Paul wrote these words to challenge believers to comfort and encourage one another when a loved one dies.

In our present world, where we still have people fighting and dying through conflict, as well as our current pandemic, it is too easy to forget about hope. St. Paul's letter is a valuable reminder for us, that those of us who live in Christ have hope. Even when we confront death, when we remember and mourn those who have died, we have hope. In a world like ours, hope is an amazing thing to have and this hope is not wishful thinking.

We're not being told to not mourn, or not to grieve when we lose someone close to us. Jesus himself wept at the death of his friend. When we hear the names of those on our parish war memorials, they were all mourned and missed by their families, their community, our communities. We can think

about how their lives might have unfolded, how they would have lived had they returned from the wars in which they fought. It's right that we should grieve and mourn for those lives unlived.

St. Paul is NOT telling us not to mourn. He is telling us that in our grief we have hope that death for faithful Christians is but a sleep until the return of Christ. Hope can be defined as "confident expectation", and was an important part of St Paul's mission to early Christians.

So, as we go into this latest stage of lockdown, may we have confident expectation that next Remembrance Sunday we may be able to be together in person and commemorate 100 years since the first RBL 'poppy day'. In the meantime, I pray that we remember and support our families, friends and those we live amongst by keeping in touch in any way that we can.

At the heart of Christian worship is the call to remember: to remember who God is, where God has been in our lives and how on Christ's return, all believers throughout history will stand reunited in God's very presence, safe and secure.
Amen