

Remembrance Sunday 2020

Joshua 4: 1-9

John 15: 12-17

We know that for many, many centuries, people have used stones and rocks to help them remember those who have died. Many churches have stones or plaques inside them; some churches have graveyards; many villages and towns have cemeteries that are filled with memorials.



Many places have war memorials that have on them the names of people who were killed during the First and Second World Wars. Some places have memorials to people who died in earlier or subsequent conflicts. The National Memorial Arboretum in Staffordshire has a huge stone memorial which

records the names of all British service personnel who have been killed since 1945.



The Royal British Legion website has an up-to-date list of the names of those who have been killed in contemporary conflicts since the Staffordshire memorial was last inscribed.

Stones serve as good reminders of things that have happened. They are strong and sturdy and do not readily break or rot away. In fact, some stones hold within them a visible testimony to former lives – fossils.

Human beings have used memorial stones for a long, long time.



They were not necessarily gravestones as we know them in cemeteries today, with names and dates carved into them: sometimes people simply made a rough pile of In the Bible we read of people who set up memorial stones. In Genesis we read about Jacob setting up a stone as a memorial to his dream about a ladder into heaven:

Sometimes they created something a bit more elaborate out of just a few larger stones – an altar. An altar was often a place of offering or sacrifice .

Genesis 8. 20 Noah built an altar;

Genesis 22. 9 Abraham built an altar;

Genesis 26. 25 Isaac built an altar;

Exodus 17.15 Moses built an altar.

In each case, we are told that the altar was built in response to what the Lord had done. Eventually a temple was built in Jerusalem, as a place in which the people could celebrate what the Lord had done. When Jesus came, he gave his followers a special way to remember him, the Last Supper. In the letter to the Corinthians (1Corinthians 11. 24), Paul tells us that Jesus said, 'Do this to remember me'. In many church buildings we have a special place around which people gather to celebrate again this Last Supper. Sometimes it is wooden, sometimes it is made of stone. Sometimes people even call it an altar

But we need ways to remember people too; it is important that no life should be forgotten, and stones can help us.



On Remembrance Sunday in Britain we use poppies to help us recall those who died in conflicts. But we also use stones: people frequently gather at war memorials because the action of gathering is also important. Gathering together shows that we support one another, and the stones gives us a place to gather around. And we lay poppy wreaths at the war memorials of renewing our remembrance each year, so that the stone is not overlooked or forgotten.

I think Remembrance Sunday should not be seen as an either/or event. That is, a militaristic celebration and glorification of war nor is it a peace demonstration. Surely, we remember the folly, the sacrifice, the agony, the heroism, the untold grief and subsequent suffering of those who came back as a reminder of how we can learn from the past and apply it to now and the future.

Folks, if we do that, it will be a first. Sadly, history seems to teach us that we seem destined not to learn from past mistakes and make the same ones over and over again. Yet we must try. As Christians we must pray.

Also, make our voices heard in public, in the ballot box and in our conversations so that, these men whose names are on the plaque and war memorial did not die in vain. That should be the best way we can honour them.

By never having to send young men and women to fight in war may be idealistic but it is worth striving for. But we must work for peace, speak tolerantly to those who disagree with us and come to a successful treaty and understanding.

Sometimes our armed forces can help in these discussions and diffuse trouble situations before escalation takes place. It is not easy, but war should always be a last resort.

May God help us in our prayers for leaders around the world to approach one another in peace. Amen.