**Readings: John 15 v9-17**

I have always found a Remembrance Sunday message to be a difficult one. I once preached on the message “Never Again,” based on the World War One motto that it was the “War to end all Wars,” but humans never believed that. In that message I quoted Churchill, who said, “it is better to jaw, jaw, than war, war,” better to talk to achieve peace. I could have quoted the words of one of the longest living World War One Veterans, Harry Ellingham who died in 2009, age 113, who said “War’s stupid. Nobody wins. You may as well talk first. You have to talk last anyway.”

But some took exception to that kind of message as they believed that we need to fight evil tooth and claw and they say World War 2 proved that, with the evil of Hitler, Mussolini, and the Japanese. You have to stand up to aggressors and curb them. Well, our nation and others have done that ever since, and the cost has been very high, and is the world a better place, is it more peaceful?

Today, whatever our view, in a Remembrance Service we must not celebrate glorious victories, but rather remember the lives given and the sacrifices made. If you don’t like that idea, and I can understand that, then remember that on other occasions, almost annually, we recall famous victories in the past, like recently the 75th Anniversary of VE Day and the 80th Anniversary of the Battle of Britain. We constantly recall victories, but today I believe has to be different: it is about remembering the awful cost of war in terms of lives lost.

I suspect that some of us today have deeply personal stories which makes today hard. In this area, it might be the loss of parents or older siblings, maybe some among them who experienced the Clydebank Blitz; or it might be the loss or serious injury of a young man or woman who served in World War 2 or Iraq or Afghanistan or some other theatre of war.

These shape our opinion of war and its necessity or folly. On the necessity side, in World War 2, if Britain and its allies had not stopped Hitler and his associates, then millions would have been under his tyrannical rule and millions more Jews would have been taken to the gas chambers and many more allied soldiers would have been killed. The cessation of that was a necessity for the human race.

The cessation of the tyrannical reign of Saddam Hossain was another necessity, as was the defeat of the ISIS movement. So, we can argue for the necessity of war. But equally we can argue for a position where we do all we possibly can to avert war. Both views find support in Scripture:

For example: Ecclesiastes 3 There is a time for love, a time for hate, a time for war and a time for peace. Deuteronomy: when you go to war. On the other side: Romans 12. As much as it is possible, live in peace with everyone. Luke 6 Love your enemies. Do not resist an evil person.

Today, all of us, of whatever age, have the evidence of the effects of conflicts: the sight of limbless men and women who fought in Afghanistan or Iraq, grieving mums, dads, wives, husbands who lost family folk in these recent conflicts. We know in this generation the costs of war.

We know it has terrible after-effects: Listen to this: A Commanding Officer lamented that when his men were coming back from Iraq or Afghanistan, they would not be given enough space to process the behavioural changes required from being in the conflict zone, to being back in ordinary life.

He gave this example: Armoured vehicle drivers are trained that on driving down a residential street, where children might be out playing, they are to be mindful of what’s going on around them. If a ball should roll out into the road, they must quickly accelerate. Even if they see a child run out after it, they are not to stop, swerve or avoid. The risk of that child, or that ball, being a suicide bomb or a decoy is too great.

A few weeks later, that same man or woman, might be driving on the streets in the UK. The same ball rolls out into the road, and the same child comes rushing after it…... This is a small part of the reality of warfare. Children become bombs, and careful drivers have to suspend their compassionate instincts. Who wins?

Just recently, I heard a veteran of the Afghanistan conflict pleading that fireworks be limited to earlier in the evening. He was woken up by loud bangs late at night and in flooded terrible memories of explosions and wounds and deaths, and it was as if he was right there and it was all happening. He could hardly tell his story. Poor man.

For the sake of humanity, surely, we must find ways to say jaw, jaw before war, war.

In this service, we remember all those people, of whatever country, who have died in the pursuit of freedom and good. We acknowledge publicly and humbly, and before God, that countless people have given their lives for us. We must pray for all who suffer and have suffered as a result of war, and remember that these man and women did give their tomorrow for our today.

Remembrance is an odd thing: Many of us can remember the time when we fell in love, got married, and had children. We can remember – because those memories are fixed in our minds. And time cannot rob us of those so long as our memory continues to function.

The problem, though, is that sometimes memory fails us. Sometimes we forget, which is why the annual Remembrance Day Service helps us to remember what we have, and that our relative peace here was not bought cheaply.

Today we say, “Thank you” and in particular, we as Christians remember the words “greater love has no man than this, that he gives his life for his friends.” That saying of Jesus reflects Jesus perfectly: he gave his life on the cross for his friends and also for his enemies. He died for the sins of the world, yours and mine. Its terrible when a son or a daughter dies in conflict, but when the Son of God dies then the cost is colossal. But that price paid is for our salvation, to set us free from our sins, to forgive them totally, and to give us new life. The sacrifice of Jesus is to assure you and me of God’s unconditional love. That sacrifice has drawn millions to faith in Christ.

His sacrifice gives birth to faith. However, war tests faith. In war with lives lost, many people found their faith, while others lost it. Listen to this: The following lines were discovered on the body of an American soldier killed in action in North Africa, in 1944. A friend of the writer who was with him when they were written (and who survived the battle in which the writer was killed) said the soldier was a thoroughly wild character, but there were tears running down his face as he wrote these lines. Here they are: “Look, God, I have never spoken to you, and now I want to say: “How do you do?” You see, God, they told me you didn’t exist, And I, like a fool, believed all this.

Last night, from a shell hole, I saw your sky,

And I figured then they had told me a lie.

I wonder, God, if you’d take my poor hand?

Somehow, I feel you would understand.

Strange I had to come to this hellish place

Before I had time to see your face.

Well, I guess there isn’t much more to say:

But I’m glad, God, that I met you today

The zero hour will soon be here

But I’m not afraid; because you are near.

The signal has come, I shall soon have to go

I like you lots - this I want you to know.

I am sure this’ll be a horrible fight:

Who knows? I may come to your House tonight.

Though I wasn’t friendly to you before,

I wonder, God, if You’d wait at Your door?

Look, I’m shedding tears, me shedding tears!

Oh! How I wish I’d known you those long, long years

Well, I have to go now, dear God. Goodbye,

But now that I’ve met you, I’m not scared to die.”

Thank God that you and I don’t have to go “to that hellish place” which that young American Soldier wrote about before he had “time to see God’s face.” We see it today in the face of Jesus Christ. As Billy Graham said if you want to know what God is like take a long look at Jesus. His is a face of unconditional love. We thank God for his sacrifice today and know it colours with love all the sacrifices made by others for us. We wear a poppy Lest we forget.

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