

*Sermon for Remembrance Sunday 2007*

There are very few people left who can recall the slaughter of the Somme or Passchaendale, but there will be those, who like me, have been told stories about it from those who were there and who against all odds survived. It is hard now to believe that Northern France and Belgium were the scenes of such carnage.

There are, though, those here today who remember the second world war. People who know what Dunkirk and D-day were really like, people who experienced being prisoners of war in the Far East, people who lost friends or family members. For them, this act of Remembrance is particularly poignant.

There are others here today who wait anxiously for the safe return of those they care about from Afghanistan or Iraq, knowing that there have been many wounded and killed in those conflicts. And there are those who are not with us today from the 210 Transport Squadron because they are now serving in Afghanistan.

Remembrance is important for all of us, young and old, perhaps it is of even greater importance for those of us who have not been affected personally by war. For war puts into stark contrast the choices we have in life, choices between good and evil.

If we look to the second world war, there were many individual acts of bravery. Men who ran to rescue their injured fellows under heavy gunfire. Those who went back onto the beaches to help another. Those who went into the wrecked shells of houses to look for the injured. Those who risked capture and death by hiding Jews. Not only those who laid down their lives for their country and friends, but those who laid down their lives for people they did not know, who were not of their religion. Is that not the greatest love that humankind can show?

But war is not all heroism. There were those who looked after themselves first, those who gave no thought or respect for individual lives. In both wars there were those who turned their back on the injured. But worst of all there were those who turned their back on love completely. Those who tortured, starved and gassed men women and children.

It is no different today. Nor was it in any other age.

We must not forget that we too can be raised so high or sink so low. If we have not been put to the test we cannot be sure how we will behave.

We must keep alive the memories of the war. We must tell our children and make sure that they tell their children. For we must all be made aware of the choices before us, and the pressures of war show so clearly where the paths lead - on the one hand to selfless love, on the other to denial of love, denial of our own humanity.

If we turn our back on love, we inflict pain upon each other and upon God.

Yet it is so easy to turn away from love when our prejudice makes us fail to see Christ within another person, fail to see a person at all.

When a teacher treats a child as just another pupil instead of seeing him or her as a unique and valuable individual, when an employer cuts the work force and sees only numbers not names, when a government sees the homeless as an unfortunate problem that is damaging tourism, and fails to care about its causes, when a church cares only about its members and ignores the cries for help from outside its walls, then we are ignoring the soul within, we are loving selectively, we are inflicting pain. These are the seeds that if fed with a little fear and a little hate can lead to Atrocities.

The Son of Man, man as God intended man to be, perfect in love, gave his life for us. That perfection of love, perfection of humanity should be our aim. Look again at his story. Our Lord, the Son of God, thrashed, then stretched out upon a cross, humiliated, ridiculed, bleeding and in agony. Men did that to him. Ordinary men, with homes and families, but men who turned their back on love, or who chose to love selectively. Each one of us has within us the potential to evil such as this. It can slip so easily, so unobtrusively into our lives that we do not even notice its presence.

We must remember. We must look into each others eyes and seek the soul within. For if we don't, then those who died, those who sacrificed their lives for our freedom died in vain. If we don't, our Lord is crucified over and over again.

Remembrance Sunday is about the past. It is there to honour those we loved who died. Those who gave their lives for others. But even more importantly, Remembrance Sunday is about the future. Our future. The flame of remembrance can ignite a fire of burning hatred or it can kindle the light of love in our hearts. That choice is ours.