

## Reflection for Remembrance Sunday 2019

### John 15.9-17 & Beatitudes (Matthew 5)

#### Another Way...

Remembrance Day (marks the very day that World War One ended in 1918. We hold a two-minute silence at 11am on the 11th day of the 11th month to remember those who have died in any conflict. The Church of England to which we belong conducts a service with Remembrance themes, remembrance rituals and symbols, bringing it into our worship.

I was asked recently whether, following the centenary of the first Remembrance Day – whether it was appropriate to continue to hold these sort of services. It was a challenging question that I have been mulling over during these last few weeks – thinking about the WHY of Remembrance / Armistice Day – and the HOW of this act of worship.

Interestingly, as people who were directly involved in the experience of World War 1 are dying off – there has been a resurgence of commitment to keep this day of remembering – “lest we forget” – at least in the UK. The first world war somehow gained the title “The War to end all wars” – which of course sounds so hollow today, as war after war has broken out all over our world. We do not seem to have learnt the lessons from this first industrialised and mechanised war – of the “The law of unintended consequences in violent conflicts” – so we do need to keep remembering. I would like to add that this remembering of the untold carnage of conflict in one war after another – helps to keep in perspective our current political wrangling and to warn us to keep looking for ways to understand and work together WITH our differences. Two years ago the Secretary General of the United Nations, Antonio Gutierrez stated: “We are a world in pieces. We need to be a world at peace.”

Secondly – we still need these rituals of Remembrance within our church because we seek to follow the Prince of Peace who taught us to pray – to God our heavenly Father – YOUR kingdom come, YOUR will be done – FORGIVE us our sins as we FORGIVE others... huge lines which we need to hold in tension with how we feel about the need for wars sometimes – and the need for remembering what people have done in war in the name of God, in the name of the Prince of Peace, in the name of Love.

I was reminded this last week of Bishop Michael Curry's sermon at Prince Harry and Meghan's wedding. The thread running through his talk was "There's power in love." - "When we discover that, we will be able to make of this old world a new world." A world where unselfish, sacrificial, redemptive love is the way."

"And **that way of unselfish, sacrificial, redemptive love** can change lives and it can change this world. If you don't believe me, just stop and think and imagine a world where love is the way.

Imagine our homes and families when this way of love is the way. Imagine our neighbourhoods and communities when... Imagine our governments and nations when... Imagine business and commerce when this love is the way... When love is the way, we will lay down our swords and shields down by the riverside to study war no more."

In our Gospel reading today, Jesus has been helping his disciples and friends understand that he has to go away. He reassures them that he will send them a helper, the Holy Spirit, to help them keep his commandment – "love one another as I have loved you." **Jesus then points ahead to his own sacrificial, unselfish, redemptive love** – which will lead to us death. This is where the text has been dangerously misinterpreted – especially during the First World War – it became the battle cry for young, loving, courageous men to go to war and die for their country – "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends."

And they did, in their tens of thousands. NT Wright: God honours, I believe, the self-sacrifice and dedication of those who sincerely and devoutly believed they were doing their duty. But I also believe God judges those who use texts like this as a convenient rhetorical trick to put moral pressure on other people.”

Jesus command to love is given by the one who has himself done everything that love can do. His way of love did indeed bring him up against powers that sought to crush him because he was too much of a threat.

**Yet - at the heart of his cruel torture and death - our Christian faith challenges state violence.** Rachel Mann has written a thought-provoking book about ritual, memory and God – associated with “the Great War”.

“Christ is not so much about the glory of sacrifice as the exposure of violence and its mechanics, and it is also the invitation to commit to a different way.

God, in Christ becomes our victim, handed over to us, the subject of our jealousies, fears and desire to be in control. This is a man caught up in and destroyed by the violence of the world – in which we are all complicit. So God in Christ is found in the midst of those who were and are broken by war – he is forsaken and separate and yet he maintains his love.

The Easter resurrection scenes discover Jesus ready to forgive and be reconciled to those who ran away from him. Our challenge today – is to remember and honour those who have died, seeking to bring peace, victims of horrific violence. Our honest response today – is to recognise that we have the seeds of war within our own relationships. Our invitation today is also to commit to a different way – AS Bishop Curry talks of – to lives where LOVE IS THE WAY.. grounded in the way we treat each other – here at La Côte church, in our neighbourhoods, and families and places of learning and work.

JPritchard writes, (2018, p. 62)

Love needs grounding in our every day lives, as Bishop John Pritchard writes in his latest book, "Five Events that Made Christianity":

"Love is a cup of coffee with a troubled friend; love is sending a card of encouragement; love is staying on to clear up after everyone has gone home; love is remembering to phone; love is listening; love is giving to that disaster fund even though you're a bit short yourself; love is visiting even though she has dementia; love is volunteering at the holiday club; love is praying for the person you said you'd pray for. Love is for life, not just for Christmas."

Coming back to the Remembrance theme - I will give Rachel Mann the last words:

Her book is dedicated to "the ones who never came back, and the ones who came back but were never the same." Including her two grandfathers - Bert and Sam. She ends the book with these words:

Referring to her grandfathers "I'm not ready to let them go... I want to keep and honour their particularity and say that what they did was not mere chaff or that they were dupes or just victims. That would be another way to let them join the ranks of the forgotten or the missing.

So I shall continue to keep the silence that our culture has made for itself every Remembrance Sunday.

**And I shall try to be part of a community of atonement that keeps our violence in sight and tries to live another way. I shall try to live in the midst of compromise, a creature of unclean, but hopeful hands."**