

3rd Sunday before Advent

Micah 4: 1–5

Romans 8:31–39

John 15: 9–17

9 November 2025 Holy Communion St James, Shirley

Address

Once again we gather to remember. Remembrance Sunday reminds us of faces and names, medals and memories, stories that belong to families, to communities, to a nation. We bring questions: why was this sacrifice asked of ordinary people, and what does it ask of those of us who remain?

Today we listen to Micah's vision of a world at peace and hear the claim that such a future is not merely wishful thinking but the work we are called to pursue.

Micah offers a beautiful vision of a world at peace, beyond the corruptions and violence of the age. We love the familiar words of this passage but it seems that the majority of humanity cannot find a way to make this happen. I read again in the week the prophetic words of the American General Omar Bradley who said this:

'We have grasped the mystery of the atom and rejected the Sermon on the Mount. Ours is a world of nuclear giants and ethical infants. We know more about war than we know about peace, more about killing than we know about living.'

I think some of this was echoed in the news this week. It was sobering and saddening to hear from Alec Penstone, aged 100, who fought in World War II, and who appeared on ITV's Good Morning Britain on Friday. When asked what his message was for Remembrance Sunday, he said: "My message is, I can see in my mind's eye, those rows and rows of white stones, of all the hundreds of my friends who gave their lives. For what? No I'm sorry. The sacrifice wasn't worth the result that it is now. What we fought for was our freedom and even now, it's a darn sight worse than what it was when we fought for it."

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There are many answers to his bitter, honest question. There are reasons we can and should affirm why that sacrifice mattered: to halt tyranny, to protect neighbours and to resist evil. Yet his words force us to face a painful truth in that remembering can reveal failure as well as heroism. It can convict us when the world shaped by our choices drifts from the good for which so many gave their lives.

So what does it mean to honour their sacrifice? It means more than annual ceremonies; it means working towards Micah's vision. It means choosing the hard work of peace-making rather than the natural temptation of apportioning blame. It means refusing the idols of power, wealth and dominion that too often justify war, and instead practicing generosity, justice and compromise in daily life. It means shaping our politics, our schools, our communities, and our homes around the flourishing of all people.

This is hard but not naïve because it is rooted in the Christian hope Paul lays before us in Romans:

“For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

This hope gives us courage: the future is not determined by present idols or by the violence of the moment, or the failures of the past. Because Jesus lived, died and rose, the promise of life—true life is open to us. That life calls us to courage, to repentance where we have failed, and to active work for peace.

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So today, as we remember, let us determine to honour the fallen not merely with words but with lives that bring about the world for which they hoped, and for the kingdom that Jesus died. Amen

Rev'd Richard Haynes Remembrance Sunday