

## Remembrance Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> November 2018

Micah 4.1 - 5	Ephesians 6.10 - 18, 23, 24	Matthew 5.1 - 12
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There are times when words fail us, of that there is no doubt. And yet, as human beings we cannot stop ourselves attempting to put into words our experiences, our ideas, our yearnings – and from time to time our horror.

We find ourselves caught up in the impossibility of saying anything and the inescapable need to keep speaking.

Out of this dilemma comes much of the Bible.

Out of this dilemma comes two minutes silence at a war memorial.

In our reading from Micah's prophecy this morning Micah is God's reluctant agent, and he offers a message of hope forged in the crucible of bitter all too familiar experience of violence. It is a message of judgment, and of saving justice. It is also a declaration of God's mercy which is difficult, challenging to put our faith in. And why wouldn't he? Punishment is after all relatively straightforward: you do wrong, you're punished. End of story.

But Micah is proclaiming God's purposes rather than ours, and this means that violence is never the end of the story. The possibility of peace is real, even when that possibility appears distant and unlikely. And by peace, we mean *shalom*. The Latin word *Pax*, from which comes our word *peace*, means to desist from violence. *Shalom* means to go further and actively promote well-being, the well-being that Christ teaches us can only be

achieved by refusing to perpetuate the violence that is such a feature of our world, both then and now. Which takes us to the meaning of the Beatitudes: daunting, impossible – for us perhaps. But they go to the heart of Jesus' message of God's saving justice – God's salvation.

For us, worshipping today on the 11<sup>th</sup> day of the 11<sup>th</sup> month, exactly 100 years after the guns fell silent on the Western Front, the fulfilment of this story has to be bound up with our allegiance to Christ. Like the writer of the Letter to the Ephesians we must look for words and images to help us to say what is in our hearts and minds. That writer used the language of war itself to turn violence on its head and to put across his conviction that in Christ alone we find true peace, true comfort. Those who confronted the horrors of trench warfare and the enormous loss of life, also looked for ways to say what for them was unsayable. In doing so they turned, yes, to the Bible, but elsewhere too. The language of chivalry was taken up in speaking of warriors and sacrifice: as we were reminded on Friday evening, lives were not taken, but offered; men were not killed, they fell. Some turned to Stoic philosophy as expressed in the *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius, the warrior Emperor of Rome, translations of whose work began to sell in great numbers as the War went on, and afterwards as people sought to come to terms with their experiences. I can't be alone in thinking that at one and the same time, such language and ideas were in the end inadequate, while remaining searingly poignant in their attempt to make sense of it all.

And then someone came up with the idea of two minutes' silence which means that in the midst of all the words, spoken and inscribed on thousands of memorials across the country, we simply stop and for two whole minutes say – NOTHING! For some who will be present, it won't be the silence of eternity. For we who proclaim Christ it must be just that and as such, not so much an absence of words, as a reverent acknowledgement that while in some circumstances the right words will be beyond our grasp, where Christ, the Word made flesh is present, nothing is beyond his grasp. He who has experienced the full horror of human violence, will never fail to be present in human suffering and grief.

And so we will stand for two minutes in silent prayer that God who in God's mercy sent us Christ will teach us to face unflinchingly the horror of which we are all too capable, strengthened in this prayer by the conviction that here, now, always, the hope that lies within us will never let us down. As we do, we may be helped by these words, spoken by John Donne, the Dean of St Paul's, in Christmas 1624:

In heaven it is always autumn, His mercies are always in their maturity. We ask for our daily bread and God never says you should have come yesterday, He never says you must come again tomorrow, but today if you hear His voice, today He will hear you.'

AMEN.