

3rd Sunday before Advent – Remembrance Sunday
2 Thessalonians 2:1-5, 13-17; Luke 20:27-38
November 2025 Holy Communion St James, Shirley

Homily- Our experience shapes our hope

Remembrance

“A quote often attributed to Winston Churchill states that ‘The further backwards we look, the further forward we can see.’”
Today that helps us hold together memory and hope. In Paul’s words to the Thessalonians we hear warnings about false leads and a call to stand firm, rooted in the Gospel and perseverance. In Luke’s confrontation about resurrection, we are reminded that God is God of the living, not the dead, and that death does not have the final word but it might look different to how we imagine.

On Remembrance Sunday our past shapes how we imagine the future: memory teaches prudence, and sacrifice shapes resolve. As Christians we need to be aware of dangers of the present that we can see repeating themselves and confident in our future hope – even though that looks different to how much of our current culture seeks to shape it.

God and gods

St Paul warns the Thessalonians that opposition is real: spiritual in origin but painfully tangible in how it works through our lives and cultures. That opposition offers rival “gods” — ideologies and ambitions that make a kind of sense in the moment but point us away from the Jesus whom the Spirit reveals. Read against the Sermon on the Mount, these alternatives champion values opposite to the beatitudes: land, wealth and power become aims in themselves, and the common good is dismissed as naïve or impossible. History shows how such false deities have justified violence and hardened hearts.

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On Remembrance Sunday this matters. Memory exposes the human cost when those rival gods are followed; it warns us about seductive narratives that normalise domination and exclusion. Paul's counsel is simple and urgent: do what is good; speak what is true; stay rooted in thanksgiving and faithful practice so your life bears the shape of the hope God gives. As the saying goes, "The further backwards we look, the further forward we can see." Remembering rightly helps us recognise false promises and keep our eyes fixed on the counter-cultural hope of Christ.

An unexpected hope

Jesus is debating with Sadducees – sort of temple priests and they asked him about resurrection which was one of the Jewish theories of what happens when people die, knowing that he'd been preaching this but it presented a conundrum.

In ancient Jewish tradition, there was a practice called Levirate marriage, found in Deuteronomy. If a man died without children, his brother was expected to marry the widow and have a child in his name — so the family line and inheritance could continue. It was a way of protecting the widow from poverty and keeping land within the family. Normally, marrying a brother's wife was forbidden, but this was a compassionate exception for childless cases.

The Levirate law shows how deeply the community sought to hold memory and secure continuity; Remembrance Sunday does the same for us, only more widely — we remember so that the lives and sacrifices of the past shape how we live now. But Jesus pushes us further: the future he points to is not a simple extension of the past but a re-shaping of life itself. That can be consoling and unsettling at once. For many who come hoping for

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an exact reunion with the way things were, Jesus' words about relationships being "different" in the resurrection can feel like a pastoral challenge. Yet this is the heart of unexpected hope — a promise that, amid loss and ambiguity, God will make life new in ways we cannot fully imagine now.

Remembering grounds us in loyalty; it also frees us to imagine a future that is better, transformed, and ordered toward life, justice and compassion, even when that hope asks us to let go of easy expectations. Our idea of the future may be challenged by this.

Future

As we move on, let us let the remembrance of sacrifice sharpen our eyes so we spot the false promises that seek to seduce our world; and let the unexpected hope of Christ form the small decisions we make each day: how we speak, how we share and with whom, who we criticise and how.

As the saying reminds us, "the further backwards we look, the further forward we can see". Remembering rightly teaches us the lessons that shape our judgments and hopes so we can choose differently for a better future, and trust that, even it seems different to how we imagine, God he is God not of the dead, but of the living; for to him all of them are alive. Amen.

Rev'd Richard Haynes 3rd Sunday before Advent (Remembrance Sunday)