

Address for Holy Communion on Remembrance Sunday

Silence

This last week at a school assembly based on Armistice and Remembrance Day, I asked the children, how long do we keep the silence at 11am? The first hand to be raised said confidently that it was for one hundred minutes! Well, not quite. The next person got it right at two minutes.

A two –minutes silence, in a busy world of busy lives and busy minds, can perhaps sometimes seem longer than it is. It can take time to adjust our minds to stop and reflect - which is exactly what it is for. There is after all, much to reflect on. Not only do we remember those who have lost their lives in past conflicts and all those affected, but I am sure our minds also think about those conflicts around the world today, of which there are many; and perhaps you dare to think about, or even pray about, the future. Perhaps the two-minutes silence doesn't slow our minds down, but actually speeds them up! I wonder what you think about and reflect on in that two minutes...

Remembering the past

Remembrance Sunday is a time when past, present and future all come together.

Recalling the past allows us to ensure that the sacrifice of those who gave *their today's for our tomorrow's* will not be forgotten, as they should not ever be forgotten. This applies not just to those who lost their lives, but to all who were affected by that loss. To acknowledge this, is important because it is all too easy to forget the price that has been paid for peace. To be still for those two minutes is to bring to the forefront of our minds the significant loss of life that war and conflict have caused.

Reflecting on the present

However, this current Remembrance weekend has fallen at a time where the media is bringing to us something of the significant suffering caused by war and conflict. amongst the countless conflicts which are going on around the world, the war in Ukraine and in the Holy Land continue to shock us, upset us and to cause anger and further division and discord, even far away from the actual battlefields. As I write this, I had the news on TV where there were live pictures of violence in central London, where extreme right-wing political groups fought with police. All of this stoked up by the battlefield that is social media in the build-up to Armistice Day.

Is this really what the hard-won freedom envisaged by those honoured at the Cenotaph would have had in mind? What did those veterans in attendance think?

So perhaps for many us, our thoughts this weekend cannot help but fall upon the appalling and distressing images and stories coming out of the Holy Land – Gaza and Israel. The events of October 7th opened yet another new chapter in the long, complex and bloody history that exists between people of this land: A history which, for us who follow the Bible, begins back in the early chapters of the Old Testament set at least fourteen hundred years BCE.

The Ukraine-Russia war, which has deeper and more complex roots than we may think, has mostly united more people than it has divided, but with the conflict in the Holy Land, division is more obvious and has become more extreme. There is an exchange of blame which is akin to the, *well they started it*, logic I remember from the school playground, but which in this case leads to far more devastating consequences. We are encouraged, sometimes even goaded to take sides: to take a position on how this should be

resolved and who is in the right. But each argument is rebuffed and replaced with another – and we get nowhere except increasingly aggressive.

This results in one side's opinion being so correct that the other side is always wrong – and no compromise or reconciliation is then sought, let alone found. Reconciliation can only come when we understand that it isn't about getting everyone to agree on something, but finding a way to disagree well. Perhaps that is what is going on here:



(A woman who was held captive by Hamas since 7 October shook her captor's hand and said shalom - goodbye in Hebrew, or literally "peace".

Yocheved Lifschitz, 85, is a peace activist. She and her husband Oded, who is still being held hostage, have spent years helping sick Palestinians in Gaza get to hospital.¹⁾

Who suffers the most when things become so intractable? The innocent of *all* sides. The UN reports that in this conflict a child dies every ten minutes². The death and suffering of *all* people should be deeply mourned because it is our conviction that humans are made in God's image. And it is deeply disturbing when God's name is invoked to promote violence.

How much do we *need* a period of silence, and reflection to try and understand what God really does say about all of this?!

¹ [Released Israeli hostage shakes her captor's hand - BBC News](#)

² [One Palestinian child dies every 10 minutes in Israeli attacks in Gaza - EFE Noticias](#)

Hope for the future

Which brings us to the future. I think it fitting that today in this place we will celebrate the Eucharist, which is also a moment of past, present and future, coming together. We remember the life, death and resurrection of Jesus and we hear the words, “do this in remembrance of me” which means not just taking the bread and wine, but living lives as a disciple of Christ – blessed are the peacemakers for instance.

And today’s readings from Amos, Thessalonians and Matthew³ are forward looking – reflective of the Church’s approach to Advent when we think about the future coming of Christ. This is a time of reflection on the past and present, and preparation for the future.

The texts encourage us to take a fresh look our past and present and ask what we have learned and what we can do better in the future.

Cross and Resurrection

A quote often attributed (probably incorrectly) to Winston Churchill states that “The further backwards we look, the further forward we can see”.

At Remembrance and in those two minutes of silence we look back on a history of death, sacrifice and suffering; and of lamps going out; but also at the hope that after the death, sacrifice, suffering and lights-out of Good Friday, the new life, new hope and new light of Easter and Resurrection.

This is the hope we celebrate in our Communion, not just for ourselves but for all we remember, honour and give thanks for. Let us never forget. Amen.

Richard Haynes 12.11.23

³ Amos 5: 18-24; 1 Thessalonians 4: 13-end; Matthew 25: 1-13