

Worship 8st November 2020 – Remembrance Sunday

Aberlour Parish Church

Rev Andrew Kimmitt

Introduction

Hello and welcome to online worship for Aberlour Parish Church, this Remembrance Sunday 8th November.

Remembrance Sunday this year cannot be the way we have come to expect it – yet our remembering – remembering the cost of war to our world, and the sacrifices made by those who serve in the armed forces - remains as significant as ever.

In our digital service we have filmed the laying of wreaths at the war memorials in Aberlour and Craigellachie, and as well as our Act of Remembrance and normal service, I'm very pleased to be able to thank Lt Gen Sir Alastair Irwin for the opportunity to include an interview I had with him about the importance of remembrance and the work of PoppyScotland. Sir Alastair is the president of PoppyScotland and the Royal British Legion Scotland, and a local resident here in Craigellachie.

Prayer of Approach

Jesus, you are our peace:

In you we become new, one single humanity.

Come among us with your gift of peace:

**Not as the world gives, in fear and suspicion,
but as you give, in love and truth.**

Come among us and banish the weapons of war:

**Speak peaceably to every nation, that your rule may extend
from sea to sea, to the ends of the earth.**

Come among us with good news for the poor:

**With release for the captives and prisoners,
with sight for the blind, with deliverance for the oppressed,
with the fair distribution of the resources of your world.**

Come among us that we may hunger and thirst to see right prevail:

That we may show mercy, that we may be peacemakers.

You are our peace.

You are the way,

You are the truth,

You are the life.

**Fill our lives with your spirit
of love, joy and peace.**

Amen.

Readings

Matthew 5: 43-48

(from Jesus' sermon on the mount)

43 "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.' 44 But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45 so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. 46 For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? 47 And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? 48 Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

John 15:12-13

(from Jesus teaching his disciples at the Last Supper)

12 "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. 13 No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends.

Reflection

To this day, in school classrooms across the land, the poetry of Wilfred Owen is learned, studied, and often taken to heart. His visceral and gut-wrenching accounts of the First World War, and his justified cynicism of jingoistic war-rhetoric have left their marks on every generation since. This year, 2020, marks the centenary of his poems being published, 2 years after his death – a century since poems like Anthem for Doomed Youth, and Dulce et decorum est entered the British consciousness.

Owen, himself a wounded soldier from the trenches, struggled with the fact that both sides of the war claimed their cause in the name of God. He struggled with the idea of a God of peace and love; who seemed so utterly absent from the horrors he had witnessed. He struggled – as I think we all do – to reconcile the world he saw around him, with the idea that there is a God who appears to let all manner of terrible things happen.

If we don't struggle with some of the same questions, then – I'd suggest - we are either extremely naive, or have a horrific lack of empathy.

But struggling is not the same as rejection.

And yet we know that there are many for whom the fact that we have war, becomes a reason to God. While it's not the path I take, I have much sympathy for those who go that way.

Richard Dawkins, atheist extraordinaire, famously painted to a portrait of religion as being a cause, if not *the* cause of all histories wars. And on that assertion, among others, he has vigorously and aggressively attacked the views of people of faith. It does make one wonder whether a world without faith would really be so blissfully free of conflict as Dawkins might want us think.

But the point carries, I think, that questions arise about the interplay of religion and conflict.

And yet; we'll shortly hear Lt General Sire Alastair Irwin talk about how how so often for soldiers, who lead lives that are in preparation for the event of armed conflict, that precisely in the time of danger and horror, faith takes all the more important role in life.

So if God doesn't want war, then why do people go to fight in God's name?

And if God is about peace, then why doesn't God do anything about the conflicts we see?

These are of course questions suited more to books upon books of careful consideration than short reflections, and I don't pretend that decisive and satisfying answers are possible in my next few sentences.

But I do want to draw a distinction between religion – as a human response to what we think we know about God; and the God of faith. Religion is human. Humans are often wrong: we – all of us - easily veering off onto ways of life that are about power, greed, self-sufficiency – and easily fuelled into action by fear, ignorance and certainty that *we* are right while *they* are wrong.

There is space for religion to be wrong, humanly wrong. Christianity throughout history has changed course in pursuit of having a faith which believes more nearly and more truly that which is demanded in response to the God of Love. The church has gotten it wrong. But it would be a mistake to reject the God of peace and love over the sins of those who take God's name for their own.

And I do want to raise a question over whether God really is doing nothing about human conflict. Too often we imagine God as the bearded fellow in the clouds with thunderbolts at hand – and anger at God because we don't see those thunderbolts directed at intervening to magically and forcefully to stop wars. Or at least put an end to our enemies. And maybe that's why we resort to our own terrible thunderbolts: the violent force of bombs, guns, and rain of fire that characterises acts of war.

The Christian faith instead paints a picture of a God not of thunderbolts above the clouds, but a God who took human flesh in Jesus Christ, and showed us imperfect humans what perfect humanity looks like. Jesus who taught followers not to wreak vengeance on those who do you wrong, but to love enemies. And Jesus who while commanding us to love others as God has loved us, that greater love no-one has than this: that they lay down their life for others.

Of course, that same Jesus laid down his life, and as crowds bayed, soldiers executed, and friends fled - Jesus showed nothing less than God's perfect love to them all.

Wilfred Owen, for all his wrestling with a God of peace in a world of war, expected not miraculous thunderbolts but took comfort in a Christ who knew the depth of human pain, and the scourge of 'man's inhumanity to man'. In one of his lesser known poems, he fuses the images of Christ's crucifixion with a battleground of the Somme.

At a Calvary near the Ancre

One ever hangs where shelled roads part.

In this war He too lost a limb,

But His disciples hide apart;

And now the Soldiers bear with Him.

Near Golgotha strolls many a priest,

And in their faces there is pride

That they were flesh-marked by the Beast

By whom the gentle Christ's denied.

The scribes on all the people shove

And bawl allegiance to the state,

But they who love the greater love

Lay down their life; they do not hate.

So what does God do about human conflict? God feels our pain acutely. God wills with us that peace should reign.

And God what is more: God equips us to do the work of building peace. Small and imperfect though we are, easily though we wander far – we are offered the chance, by the example of Christ, and by the grace of God to be instruments of peace and reconciliation in the world. As we commemorate Remembrance Sunday today, let us not only look back in grave gratitude, but also commit ourselves to going forward in the promise of peace.

Amen

Act of Remembrance

Let's join in remembrance of those who have sacrificed much because of war.

Let's join in remembrance of all victims of conflict.

Let's join in remembrance, not as we normally would, yet still strong in solidarity.

The Tryst

They shall grow not old,
as we that are left grow old;
Age shall not weary them,
nor the years condemn.
At the going down of the sun
and in the morning,
We will remember them.

We will remember them.

The Last Post

(followed by the Church bells ringing for 11am)

Silence

Reveille

(Church bells ring to end silence)

Hymn

Tune: Finlandia

Lest we forget, O God of love, remind us
how you detest the spectacle of war;
let us recall the errors now behind us,
firmly resolved to tread that path no more.
When passions rage, when fear and hatred blind us,
lest we forget, O God, let us recall.

Lest we forget the agony and slaughter
that lie behind the victor's public face,
let us recall the tears of wives and daughters,
the broken dreams fine words cannot replace.
Let not our hopes dissolve in fire and water;
lest we forget, O God let us recall.

Lest we forget the rapid escalation,
beyond our pow'r to forecast or control,
let us recall how nuclear conflagration
scarred for all time creation's very soul.

Then fire with hope the hearts of ev'ry nation;
lest we forget, O God, let us recall.

Lest we forget the power and the glory
that brought us through the desert and the grave,
let us recall your people's ancient story:
the pow'r of love to reconcile and save.
Love has redeemed the world from pain and fury;
lest we forget, O God, let us recall.

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Interview

Rev Andrew Kimmitt interviews Lt General Sir Alastair Irwin, President of PoppyScotland and Royal British Legion Scotland.

Unfortunately we don't currently have a transcript of the interview – but it can be viewed online by typing into an internet browser: www.aberlour.video/poppy

Prayer

O God, the heavens are yours and the earth is yours.
All lives belong to you.

Make us your messengers of peace and justice.

O God, your kingdom come and your will be done on earth, as in heaven

Make us your messengers of peace and justice.

O God, may all injustice, violence, and oppression give way to fairness, mercy, and goodwill.

Make us your messengers of peace and justice.

Teach us to use the manifold resource of the earth so that none may waste and none may want.

Make us your messengers of peace and justice.

Through our labours, may co-operation triumph over conflict;
may all people find their reward in that which works for the good of all.

Make us your messengers of peace and justice.

Keep alive the holy fire within the hearts of all who dare to be the voice of unwelcome wisdom.
Make us willing to hear hard demands.

Make us your messengers of peace and justice.

Fill us with a passion for righteousness and a zeal to serve where there is need.

Fill us with a purpose that is holy and right and just.

Teach us to love the noblest and the best.

Make us your messengers of peace and justice.

In our commitment to peace and love for the world,
Let us pray in the words of the one who is Love for the world, and in whom all peace finds root,
as Jesus taught us:

Our Father who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name,
thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.
Lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil,
for thine is the kingdom, the power and glory forever,
Amen.

Words of Sending

Look at your hands, see the touch and the tenderness...

...God's own for the world

Look at your feet, see the path and the direction...

...God's own for the world

Look at your heart, see the fire and the love...

...God's own for the world

Look at the cross, see God's Son and our Saviour...

...God's own for the world

This is God's world

and we will serve God in it.

Blessing

As we take our worship from this time out to the world:

May we remember with reverence,
may we look forward with hope,
and may the blessing of God go with you and all those whom you love,
this day and every day to come.

Amen