



Sunday, 8 November, 2020

Remembrance Sunday

Back at the start of July, I remember the joy on the faces of those who gathered in St John's for our first post-lockdown service. We dared to hope that there was a path back to some kind of normal worshipping life. Instead, it has been a dismal path through face masks and a singing ban to a second lockdown. The despondency last Sunday was as palpable as the relief in July.

That public worship has been banned again while other, far riskier activities are allowed to continue is a sad reflection of the government's incompetent, inconsistent approach; we still do not even have the official guidelines for churches. At least this time private prayer will be allowed throughout and we intend to keep both St John's and St Clement's open during the day for those who wish to make use of them. We will once again be producing a pew sheet during lockdown and we are hoping that we will also have either streamed services available.

This is going to be a difficult few weeks, not least because we have no way of knowing how long the new lockdown will last. The nights have drawn in and the weather has deteriorated. We are all weary, many of us are angry and many of us are lonely. More than ever, we need to pray and to support one another in these dreadful times. We also need to be kind to ourselves, to do what it takes to get us through this period. At the start of the last lockdown, I quoted Paul's letter to the Corinthians. Perhaps even more than in March, we need to cling to those words and enact them in our lives: 'now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.'

Phil

Collect and Readings for Remembrance Sunday

Ever-living God,
 we remember those whom you
 have gathered from the storm of war
 into the peace of your presence;
 may that same peace calm our fears,
 bring justice to all peoples
 and establish harmony among the nations,
 through Jesus Christ our Lord.
 Amen.

New Testament Reading (Romans 8:31-39)

What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written,

'For your sake we are being killed all day long;
 we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered.'

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 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.

Gospel Reading (John 15:9-17)

As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.

'This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.

Reflection for Remembrance Sunday

Phil Bradford

In 1986, forty-one years after he was liberated from Buchenwald by Allied troops, Elie Wiesel was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. He gave the Nobel Lecture he delivered in Oslo that December the title 'Hope, Despair and Memory'.¹ It is a powerful, challenging piece which remains capable of uplifting and discomfiting in equal measure, thirty-four years later. It is uplifting because, in spite of everything, it continues to assert a faith in God and a hope for the future. It is discomfiting because it lays bare the depths to which humanity can sink, exposing the dangers and agonies of memory. Wiesel, a survivor of Auschwitz as well as Buchenwald, told of the urgent duty he and his fellow survivors felt to tell their story, to make sure the world was never able to forget the horrors unleashed in the Nazi concentration camps. It proved to be a very difficult duty. At first, language failed them; an entirely new vocabulary was required for any attempt to describe the death camps, an unprecedented occurrence of systematic genocide. Then people did not wish to listen or to believe, they were not able to understand. The promise of the victors of World War II, 'never again', had proved utterly hollow by 1986. Was it not natural for the survivors to want to forget the hell they had experienced, to block out nightmares that were actually memories? 'Why go on?' Wiesel asked. 'If memory continually brought us back to this, why build a home? Why bring children into a world in which God and man betrayed their trust in one another?' Forgetting, as he observed, is not only a natural human defence mechanism, but also necessary if we are to be able to live outside 'a

¹ Elie Wiesel, 'Hope, Despair and Memory', Nobel Lecture for the 1986 Nobel Peace Prize, 11 December, 1986, available online at <http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/1986/wiesel-lecture.html>.

permanent, paralyzing fear of death'. The real question was how to balance those two human needs, the need to remember and the need to forget. Forgetting alone was not an option, for as Wiesel argued, 'remembering is a noble and necessary act. The call of memory, the call to memory, reaches us from the very dawn of history. No commandment figures so frequently, so insistently, in the Bible.'

It is indeed a frequent and insistent command in the Old Testament. Repeatedly in the Torah, God remembers his covenant with Abraham, while the Israelites are given repeated orders to remember some part of the Exodus story, not least the Passover. Yet this demonstrates how partial memory can be. In remembering the deliverance from Egypt and the coming of the Promised Land, where is the memory of those who suffered and were expelled from that Promised Land for the Israelites? Only Native American theologians, themselves victims of those who saw their home as a Promised Land and conquered it, identify with the Canaanites. Our Christian memory is similarly partial. Last week, we celebrated All Saints and today, were it not Remembrance Sunday, would be marked as the Saints and Martyrs of England. The lists for both include many who suffered and died for their faith. But where do we remember those who suffered *at the hands of* the Christian faith? There are no days to commemorate those Jews slaughtered at Christian hands in the century before their expulsion from England in 1290; there is no place in our church calendar for those burned as heretics across the centuries. These are just a couple of English examples. Particularly pertinent today is the question of how we remember the Second World War. It is often described as a 'good' or 'necessary' war, in that its end result was the defeat of Hitler and the destruction of Nazism, and that justified the alliance with Stalin's Soviet Union. True enough, for those of us in the West. But such a narrative of World War II would be far less obvious to those in Eastern Europe, to the peoples of Estonia, Latvia and

Lithuania who lost their independence and were absorbed into the USSR, or to those countries who found themselves run as satellite states from Moscow after 1945. Poles who saw Warsaw razed to the ground by German troops in 1944, whilst the Red Army stood across the River Vistula and watched the Wehrmacht save them a job, legitimately questioned which side was the enemy.

That is not to play down the importance of memory, or to argue that memory is simply about an accurate historical narrative, but rather to emphasise that remembering is not only a straightforward reciting of the past. Our presence in church every Sunday is as participants in an act of memory that is both historical and ongoing: think of the words in the Eucharistic Prayer, 'Do this in remembrance of me'. Jesus was himself partaking in an act of memory at that moment, the celebration of the Passover. Memory lies at the very heart of our Judeo-Christian faith, and at the heart of what we are doing today. There will be those of you who have a tangible link with the wars of the last century, be it as part of your own past or from stories told by your relatives. The link is less clear for others like me, born decades after World War II had ended. The fact that I have no memories of those years, however, does not absolve me of a duty to remember, not least in a world still torn apart by conflict. It has not escaped my notice, as the years advance, that the majority of those commemorated on First World War memorials died younger than I am now. As we remember those who died in that and other conflicts, we remember too that disrupted future, the lives all those young men were denied. We honour their sacrifice and mourn their loss. But remembrance is more than just recalling the past and mourning the dead. What we are reminded of this morning, as we honour the memory of the countless millions who have died in or as a result of war, is how readily humankind resorts to bloodshed and the terrible cost that has had. We can only truly honour the memory of the

dead if we look forwards as well as backwards, resolving to be inspired by their memory and the memory of their sacrifice to work for the peace in which God calls us to live. That is the other, future-orientated part of remembrance, that process of re-remembering, putting back together our shattered and bloodstained human society and trying to build a future of peace.

And that was the hope which Elie Wiesel found. Haunted by his own memories, he argued passionately that our need to remember compelled us to do all within our power to work for peace. On Remembrance Sunday, the words with which he ended his lecture in 1986 serve equally to remind us that we honour the memory of the dead only if we ensure that they did not die in vain, and work for a world of peace.

‘There may be times when we are powerless to prevent injustice, but there must never be a time when we fail to protest. The Talmud tells us that by saving a single human being, man can save the world. We may be powerless to open all the jails and free all the prisoners, but by declaring our solidarity with one prisoner, we indict all jailers. None of us is in a position to eliminate war, but it is our obligation to denounce it and expose it in all its hideousness. War leaves no victors, only victims. [...] Mankind needs to remember more than ever. Mankind needs peace more than ever, for our entire planet, threatened by nuclear war, is in danger of total destruction. A destruction only man can provoke, only man can prevent. Mankind must remember that peace is not God's gift to his creatures, it is our gift to each other.’

Contacts

During the period while services are not being held and vulnerable groups are being asked to self-isolate, we realise that many people may find things difficult or lonely. Please do feel free to contact the clergy, especially for pastoral or spiritual matters, but also for any other reason. In addition to the two stipendiary clergy, the retired clergy in our area are also happy to be contacted for support or advice. While routine pastoral visits are being strongly discouraged, a healthy member of the clergy will always be available to make urgent visits, so please do ask.