

Remembrance Sunday Nov. 2016

Today is a time for remembering.

Several of us gathered together last Sunday evening to remember... to remember family and friends who have died, who we still love but no longer see.

Today is a bit different. Some of us may be remembering loved ones who have died in war.

But today we also take time to remember those who we don't know personally but who have given their life or health for their country and for the privilege of our freedom. And the freedom of others.

It is a day that draws many to come together and to remember.

Penny & Paul have gone away on a cruise and she was saying that usually when they are away the Sunday services, held in the theatre on board ship, attract just 20 or so people.

But last time they were away for Remembrance Sunday the theatre was packed; every seat was taken, people stood all around the edges of the theatre and in every allowable space.

MANY gathered together to remember and honour those who have gone before us, sacrificially, in order that we may live a life of freedom.

The substance of our remembering differs one to another.

Some of us will have been on active service in war and conflict situations. We know first hand what it is to fight and face the enemy, what it is for comrades to die, and us to survive.

For some of us our remembering is not from personal active service but that of our immediate family being involved in face to face conflict. And who may or may not have spoken about their experiences.

And for some of us, we have not lived through the closeness of war situations, but have heard and read and seen of the experience from secondary sources.

I can remember vividly watching John Cravens News Round on the telly in the early 70's when conflict in Northern Ireland was rising to a peak, and being terrified that war was about to break out. In one sense war had broken out. But my fears were that, as an 8 or 9 year old it would mean an end to my peaceful living. That the scenes I was seeing on TV would happen in my street and to my friends and family.

We heard in the gospel reading Jesus warning his friends, his disciples that war and insurrections would occur. In this passage he is specifically referring to the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem and the fighting that would take place... nations against nations, kingdom against kingdom, family member against family member.

And he tells them not to be terrified, for he knows that these things will happen.

The disciples did not need to be terrified because Jesus offered something greater. Something more precious. Something more permanent.

The words of Micah (4:1&2) say it beautifully:

'But for you who revere my name the sun of righteousness shall rise, with healing in its wings'

Those of us with faith have a hope beyond the immediate, beyond our sometimes horrific memories of war.

The power of remembering connects us with sadness and it also inspires us in hope.

Remember some of the other words of Jesus

Love your enemies
Do good to those who hate you
Bless those who curse you
Pray for those who mistreat you

Because of the promises of God, we remember not to allow the past to capture us in its worst moments but to build us up for the future. We remember not only to honour the fallen, but to raise them in our hearts and to promise to live lives worthy of their sacrifice.

Jesus knew the power of remembrance when he took a loaf of bread, blessed it and gave it to his friends saying, 'this is my body' and gave them wine to drink saying, 'this is my blood' and told them to remember him in this way. For of such simple things is the kingdom of God made – the long hoped for future of justice and peace, mercy and truth. And of such remembrance comes the forgiveness of sins, the cleansing of our hearts and souls of our faults and failures and the all-too-painful realities that accuse us when we think on the qualities of others, and judge ourselves by the sacrifice made by those who cannot be here because they have given their all.

It is our duty this day to ensure that those who in the cause of peace have given, and continue to give, of their life, their health, their youth, are honoured and remembered.

But in our remembering we must also vow to give of ourselves for the good of humanity, especially of the generations yet to come; who will themselves one day stand in silent remembrance and grow in hope.