

Sermon preached at St Mary's by The Bishop of Warwick
on the Commemoration of the 100th Anniversary of the End of World War 1
Remembrance Sunday 2018

'We will remember them.' I want to begin with a moment of quiet to look around us, to take in what we see. I have never been so moved at Remembrancetide: to see what we see now. The Warwick Poppies team have been truly inspirational in what you have done. With the people of Warwick, with many shops and businesses of Warwick, with the civic leaders of Warwick, you have released a huge wave of remembering and of honouring the fallen, not only locally but nationally and internationally. You have ensured, so fittingly in this centenary year, time, day and month, in the most visually powerful and moving way that 'we – and it is a worldwide we - will remember them.'

The seed idea was itself highly ambitious at the time, to invite donations of poppies, one for every life lost by the Royal Warwickshire Regiment in WW1: 11,610. A huge target in itself. And what happened? Over 65,000 poppies have been donated. Warwick Poppies has touched a chord in thousands and thousands of people. It has moved people to respond. I use the word 'moved' because it is about head and heart. To see this extraordinary and creative display is itself profoundly moving. We can only imagine, the personal stories, the love and the sadness of loved ones lost in the horror and what Wilfred Owen called 'the pity of war'. Each poppy given speaks, surely too, of a gratitude and an honouring of lives given for the freedoms we so easily take for granted.

I am not afraid to repeat words I have quoted before at Remembrance because they challenge any temptation to sit lightly to what we owe our servicemen and women. *'It is the soldier, not the reporter, who gives us freedom of the Press. It is the soldier, not the poet, who has given us freedom of speech. It is the soldier, not the activist, who has given us freedom to demonstrate. It is the soldier, not the lawyer, who has given us the right to a fair trial. It is the soldier who salutes the flag and whose coffin is draped by the flag who permits the protester to burn the flag.'*

I have been going to Remembrance services all my life. I have been leading them for the last 35 years. I believe in the last 10-15 years more and more people, including and especially young people, are being drawn in, to remember, to honour, to give thanks. On that note, it is wonderful that the

Lord Lieutenant has organised a remembrance service for the schools of Warwickshire later this month.

What we remember, who we remember, how we remember matters. It matters not only as memory, it matters for the present and the future.

So, these poppies speak of love, of sadness. They speak of honouring the fallen. They look back. But they also look forward. They speak of a longing and a hope for peace. A longing and a hope for peace shared surely across all races and nations. Churchill begins his history of the Second World War with the words: 'After the end of the World War of 1914-18, there was a deep conviction and almost universal hope that peace would reign in the world. The phrase 'war to end all wars' was on every lip.'

But it was not be. As Churchill sadly reflected later in the same book: 'Man's control has extended over practically every sphere except himself.' Wars continue all over the world and the peace we enjoy even now is surely precarious as tectonic plates of power and ambition shift on the world stage. So we have today, as at every Remembrance, an Act of Commitment. We all have a responsibility to be peacemakers and bridge builders. To honour the sacrifice of the fallen, we must work for peace and reconciliation. We must work against the demonization of others, the dividing the world into goodies and baddies. We are all, every human being across the world, made in the image of God. In Christian language, every human being is one for whom Christ died. But no matter what our faith position may or may not be, we need to learn with the poet John Donne, that 'no man is an island entire of itself' ...and that 'every man's death diminishes me because I am involved in mankind'.

There is and there needs surely to be such a solidarity across races, nations, faiths, because I, you, we are involved in humanity. A glimpse of that solidarity across divisions was seen in the various unofficial football matches or kickabouts and exchange of cigarettes along the western front at Christmas 1914. We see it in the writing of the poet, Wilfred Owen, killed in action a week before the Armistice. He writes hauntingly in his poem '*Strange Meeting*' of meeting in the underworld the enemy soldier who had had killed him, saying to him '*I am the enemy you killed, my friend.*' We see this solidarity, reflecting God's love for all, in Edith Cavell – an English nurse and daughter of an Anglican priest. She served in German occupied Belgium in the First World War. She nursed all who were wounded, saving the lives not only of Allied troops but also the Germans without discrimination. She was accused of

treason for saving the lives of some Allied troops by helping them escape to Holland. When facing the firing squad she said: *'I have no fear nor shrinking, I have seen death so often that it is not strange or fearful to me. This I would say, standing as I do in view of God and eternity ... I realise that patriotism is not enough. I must have no hatred or bitterness towards anyone.'*

So, as we remember and as we honour the fallen, let us, precisely in order to honour their sacrifice, truly commit, locally, nationally and internationally to breaking down the dividing walls and to the healing of divisions. Each of us has a part to play.

Let us pray in the name of God, who comes in Christ to break down the dividing walls and to bring peace, that we will have the courage to step up to this call. Amen

+John Stroyan

11th November 2018. St Mary's Warwick.