

Remembrance Sunday 2017 a Rev Godfrey Hilliard

We gather once again to commemorate those who fell in the two World Wars of the last century and to remember also those who have fallen in the innumerable conflicts that have beset the world ever since the end of the Second World War which ended in 1945. It does no harm to remind ourselves that British service personnel have been engaged in some form of operational tours of duty every year since then bar one, 1967, when there was a lull in international conflict. We remember, in our own way, those whose names appear on the war memorial in our churchyard as we listen to their story and their links with our community.

We remember those who have died but also those whose bodies and minds have been scarred by the ravages of war. We think about all those who made the supreme sacrifice and gave their lives. Today, I would like us to consider some other victims of war who are with us today in society.

Let us think about those who have been scarred by war. The difference is quite simple. They are sometimes not understood or appreciated because their scars are not the visible ones that bring instant recognition and understanding, if not acceptance. I speak of the countless numbers of people that have gone undiagnosed from mental and psychological conditions brought about by the consequences of war. We shot them as cowards in the WW1, as deserters and betrayers, but their only crime was that they could not cope with the stress of their situation. This is not just true of WW1 and WW2. More have died from suicide as a result of the Falklands campaign than were killed in the conflict. What was it like to live in London during the Blitz, or, probably worse still, to have lived with the threat of the V bombs or doodlebugs- imagine what it must have been like when the engine cut out? Where was it going to land? Answer, among innocent men and women, boys and girls who did not deserve such treatment.

And so I could go on. We all see the reality of war every day on our television news broadcasts. So why are we here today? I suspect that there are many reasons. We were involved ourselves and so were our families in some of the wars and conflicts of the last and present century or perhaps we just want to be here to say thank you.

In the 1970's many had predicted that Remembrance Sunday would probably not survive the turn of the century when the majority of the survivors of WW1 and WW2 had died off. Those were the disrespectful days of the white poppy brigade, who belittled sacrifice and patriotism as bunk. The spirit of Remembrance is alive and well and living in our society. I think we can trace it back to the Falkland's campaign in 1982, which was the first major conflict since Suez in 1956 and, certainly, the first major military operation in which ships were sunk and planes shot down since WW2. This was the first time that these graphic images of British warfare appeared on our television screens- yes we had seen other conflicts on news reels days later but somehow, these were more graphic.

Why does Remembrance Sunday continues to flourish in the mind of the public psyche? Why was the observation of the two minutes silence on Armistice Day re-instated after so many years? The Royal British Legion(RBL) has, over the years, very successfully delivered an educational campaign amongst our young people that has struck a chord with them and I am sure that we would all applaud them and continue to support their efforts. As we remember, 100 years on the battles of WW1 and next year remember the Armistice, the ending of the war to end all wars, so the public awareness will be heightened. As County Chaplain to the RBL I expect to be quite busy!

As Christians we believe in peace.

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for theirs is the Kingdom of God.” Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, in St Matthew's Gospel. But we are faced with the reality of modern life.

We need to seek beyond Remembrance to the hope of Micah and his dream for the future. Micah was an Old Testament prophet, normally a person of doom and gloom, who was actually espousing an aspiration of hope for humanity which we should all wish to embrace. We should live in a world where we can confidently hope that mankind will, as Micah suggests, “beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks;” and where “nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore; but they shall sit every man under his vine and his fig tree, and none shall make them afraid.”

Sadly, we live in a world that is inhabited by mankind with all the flaws and frailties that humanity brings. We live in a world that is scarred and suffering. But we also live in a world that has been saved by God's grace which is available to us all should we choose to accept it. We must strive towards the ideal that Micah describes- an ideal where peace reigns supreme within our world. It is our duty to do all we can to encourage the end of conflict in whatever form it may take so that the sacrifice of those who have gone before us may not be in vain.

As Christians it is our duty to do all we can to end conflict where ever it may occur. It is our responsibility to make sure that in peace we may ensure that every man and woman shall be able to sit, "under his vine and his fig tree, and none shall make them afraid."

Amen.