

Remembrance Sunday



We meet in the name of Almighty God whose purposes are good: whose power sustains the world he has created: who gave his son Jesus Christ out of his great love for us. As we give thanks for his great works, we remember those who have lived and died in his service and in the service of others. We pray for all those who suffer through war and make our commitment today to work together towards peace. **Amen.**

A Reading from the Gospel of St John

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.

Address

Remembrance 2020 – a sermon un-preached *Rev Robert Van de Weyer*

When my grandfather joined the army in 1890, the older officers would have regaled him with stories of the Crimean War. No doubt the brigadiers and generals overegged their stories of heroism on the battlefield. But grandfather would already have known a good deal about the war, because it was the first war in history to have had a newspaper reporter on the scene, William Howard Russell, whose eye-witness accounts appeared in *The Times*.

Through those accounts grandfather will have learnt that far more soldiers died of disease – cholera, typhoid and dysentery – than died in battle. In fact the ratio was 1 to 5 – for every one man that died fighting, five men died of disease. It's this, of course, that prompted Florence Nightingale to go there –and she transformed the practice of nursing.

There is a rather shameful sequel to this. When a soldier died in combat, his widow received a pension, albeit quite modest; but the widow of a soldier who died of disease received nothing. This injustice continued right up to the First World War. Happily the people who created war memorials across the land after that War saw things differently, and included the names of service people who died of disease.

We are now engaged in another war where disease is central. But this time disease is not a by-product of combat. Disease, in the form of Covid 19, is the enemy itself.

Like all wars, this war is generating an ever-lengthening casualty list, of people who have either died of the disease, or whose long-term health appears marred by it – the so-called ‘long covid’. And, of course, it is producing an ever-lengthening list of heroes and heroines: most notably the nurses and other hospital staff who end the sick, and thereby risk becoming casualties themselves; but also all the other key workers.

So how should we honour these heroes and heroines?

Normally in the Remembrance season we honour those who have fought and died for our country, by recommitting ourselves to the values which they exemplified and for which they gave their lives. In the same way we should honour our present heroes and heroines by committing ourselves to the values which they exemplify and for which they are making such sacrifices. I should like to suggest three such values.

The first is human solidarity.

I am no great fan of the NHS as an organization; it is unduly bureaucratic and over-managed. But the moral value it represents is timeless and priceless: that in sickness we are all equal, and we all deserve the same treatment. The frontline hospital workers are taking great risks to make this value a reality.

So let us commit ourselves anew to this value: that in sickness the grandest billionaire and the humblest homeless are as one. And this in turn means that in every aspect of life everyone deserves equal respect and equal courtesy.

The second value is duty.

The other day I was talking to a person called Denise suffering long covid. She’s a nurse, who works in the Luton and Dunstable hospital. In the spring her ward was full of people with covid; and in April she went down with it. Now, several months later, she’s breathless, her lungs often hurt, she has almost no energy, and she frequently breaks down and weeps. But here’s the wonderful thing. She never questions what happened. She never asks: ‘Why me? Why did I ever become nurse?’ On the contrary she is grateful she was doing her duty. What’s more she wants to continue doing her duty, so she is coming back to work three days a week – albeit doing quite light tasks.

So we can honour people like that by doing our duty, doing what we know in our hearts to be right, without question.

All of us, of course, have our specific duties, which we know in our hearts to be right. So we honour Denise and her like by doing those duties without questioning and quibbling.

But there is one duty related to the pandemic that all of in our bus pass years have.

During this pandemic the various restrictions have been imposed mainly to protect older people like me; but the cost of these restrictions are mainly bourn by the young – in the form of lives and education disrupted, jobs destroyed, and vast national borrowing to be repaid. So my generation owes a huge debt of gratitude to our children and grandchildren. This means we have a duty to repay part of that debt by supporting any policy that helps the young, even at our expense.

The third value is best described as grit. My daughter-in-law works in Addenbrookes amongst elderly patients with Covid. So she faces real danger very day, and feels fear. Yet I am constantly amazed at her insistence on maintaining normal family life, and in keeping in touch with friends as much as the law allows. That takes real grit – and she tells me that her colleagues are just the same.

So how can we honour their grit by showing more grit in our own lives? By grit I mean getting on with life without grumbling and complaining. So whenever we feel a grumble and moan rising to our lips, we should swallow it.

Tennyson's great poem about the Crimean War contains these famous lines:

*Theirs is not to make reply,
Theirs is not to reason why,
Theirs is but to do and die.*

That may seem a rather over-dramatic quotation. We are not part of a Light Brigade charging canons. But it expresses rather wonderfully the virtues that our Covid heroes and heroines display, and which we should honour and emulate.

Theirs is not to make reply – that's what we mean by grit, just getting on with life, whatever the difficulties.

Theirs is not to reason why – that's what we mean by duty, doing what we know in our hearts to be right, without asking too many questions.

Theirs is but to do and die – that's what we mean by solidarity, loving others in this world, that we may die in the eternal love of God.

Act of Commendation

Let us remember before God, and commend to his sure keeping:
Those who have died for their country in war:
Those whom we knew, and whose memory we treasure:
And all who have lived and died in the service of humankind...

The Exhortation

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.

When you go home, tell them of us and say,
For your tomorrow, we gave our today

Hymns

O God our help in ages past with lyrics- West Minister Abbey:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=asrwlIxLeko&ab_channel=notyobs

I vow to thee my country with lyrics- Festival of Remembrance:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bvouc8Qs_MI&t=8s&ab_channel=BritBrit

Eternal father strong to save with lyrics- Opatriamia Remembrance:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BjcSpCSUjdk&ab_channel=opatriamia

Thine be the glory with lyrics- Kings College Choir:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UPH7-dNrwb8&ab_channel=FaveHymns

Closing Prayer

Almighty and Eternal God, from whose love in Christ we cannot be parted, either by death or life: Hear our prayers and thanksgiving for all whom we remember this day: fulfil in them the purpose of your love, and bring us all, with them, to your eternal joy : through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Blessing

God grant to the living, grace; To the departed, rest;
To the Church, the Queen, the Commonwealth, and all humankind,
Peace and concord; and to us all, life everlasting;
And the blessing of God almighty,
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
be among you and remain with you always.

Amen.