REMEMBRANCE SUNDAY 8 NOVEMBER 2026 reflection

As we have an extra element in our service at this time of year, we tend to omit some items, often the readings. We would have heard Job lamenting: *O that with an iron pen and with lead his words were engraved on a rock forever!* and this, for me on this day, calls to mind the unfathomable numbers of names inscribed on graves and war memorials throughout the world. The reading speaks also of Job's conviction that his vindicator, or saviour, lives and Job will see God.

Pauls Epistle to the Corinthians tells of the last trumpet sounding – was that what so many young men in WW1 might have thought as the harsh blast of a whistle sent them out of the trench and over the top? Paul speaks of the dead being raised imperishable through the power of Christ, the conqueror of death.

Today's Gospel follows on from the feeding of the five thousand people (men, of course – women didn't count) where the crowd asks Jesus what they should do to carry out God's work. They are seeking how to fulfil the Law correctly, and are baffled by Jesus' reply that they simply believe in him. Is that it? For goodness sake – he's just fed them, is that not a sign? Can they not perceive that he himself is the bread of everlasting life.

If they believe in him, they will gain this eternal life that permeates all three readings. Our bodies will eventually perish, but if we have faith in the Son of God we shall all be raised up on the last day, without regard to who we are, how different we are, what we have done or left undone, as in Christ no one is ever lost or left behind.

Today is Remembrance Sunday, and all around us are signs of the significance this day still holds for many folk. Poppies for sale, the Festival of Remembrance on TV, familiar and stirring hymns.
All around us are the news bulletins, the newspapers, telling of yet more atrocities in a foreign land; reminding us daily of wars and rumours of war. As each new action occurs, the media hungrily devours the latest horror, pushing aside continuing events in so many other lands. Have we become anaesthetised to these horrors, do we run the risk of overload? Have the casualties of war been reduced to a set of statistics, a formula for a new war game played by despots and megalomaniacs?

There is a plethora of websites ranking current wars by the number of deaths in the current or past year: according to one of these, there are currently eight **Major** wars with10,000 or more deaths; thirteen **Minor** 1,000-1,999; fifteen **Conflicts** 100-999; twelve **Skirmishes** 1-99. In Russia and Ukraine alone, hundreds of thousands have been killed.

There has hardly been a year when the whole world is at peace. So many young people killed; remember, Christ, too, was a relatively young man when he sacrificed himself for us. To remember the dead is not to glorify the circumstances in which they died. History might tell the story of battles won and lost, the dispassionate statistics of numbers killed, but it doesn't tell the story of individual struggle, hope, despair. Here at St James each year, it is the sacrifice of individuals – a MacGarva, a Clerk, a relative of a McGavin – and the impact on their families that we should try to remember, not let them be subsumed into the larger picture.

The supposed peace that was brought about by the end of WW1 was built upon the sacrifice of these countless individuals. Perhaps Remembrance Day helps us never to forget that peace is so often underpinned by sacrifice. Sometimes, the constant presence of violence and war in the world can make life seem overwhelming and hopeless. To counteract this, might the resurrection of Jesus encourage us that, even in the depths of despair, there is hope, and as followers of Christ we are called to be that change which our world so desperately needs.

Many of you have been following the course on ***Forgiveness.*** Surely Remembrance is closely intertwined with this, although we find it unimaginable that perpetrators of some atrocities can ever be worthy of this.

[Richard reminded me of an elderly family friend recalling the bombing of Coventry Cathedral in 14 November 1940. You might want to read the accounts online. The most significant action following the destruction was Provost Richard Howard writing in the ash on the wall: *Father, forgive* – not *forgive* ***them*** – and after the war he vowed that Coventry would work for Reconciliation].

Mankind *chooses* to kill and not to heal, to hate and not to love. Pray that all might rededicate themselves to following the example of one who bade us love another as he loved us. Loved us to the extent that he died for us.

Finally, no apologies for a quote from another poem. This, from Auden's *Epitaph for the unknown soldier:*

To save your world you asked this man to die:
Would this man, could he see you now, ask why?

Heaven forfend that Christ might feel the same about how we treat our world and our fellow human beings.

Georgina Phillips