**Sermon Nov. 14th Remembrance Day Service**

I wonder if you realised that the Remembrance Day Service, today at the Cenotaph, and elsewhere like at Stowe has been going for just over 100 years! It was sparked off in 1919 by the Great War-the largest geographical struggle before or since 1914-18. The scale of casualties was horrifying-the worst ever-40 million is the estimate-an inconceivable figure! The dead in Russia and Germany numbered 1.7 million each-in the UK it was .9 million-mostly young men. So it seemed and seems right to recall, with thanks, the incredible bravery and sacrifices of the cream of 2 or 3 generations for our freedoms in two World Wars. Sadly, there is a need to recall such sacrifices still to protect our country from terrorism, violence and hostile forces bent on destroying or hollowing out our values.

We may well ask does gratitude in a Christian context for these sacrifices-so much part of our national story and identity-make any real difference today? We can think of the immense traumatic suffering of so many whether physical or mental. There’s the grievous ripping up of relationships and networks. Each death leaves behind, probably, a widow or widower, maybe, bereaved children and, certainly, mourning parents and friends. Lastly, there is the destruction of homes livelihoods and the economic basis of society. Is there an answer? Yes-the challenge of living in a fallen world, should encourage us to seek God’s remed for it.

We may ask why did people put themselves at such risk in conflicts? Is patriotism-serving King and Country enough? Is it for self defence-to protect our national future and values we hold dear? Or, lastly, does heroism stir people to self sacrifice or are they encouraged by the camaraderie of service life? The answer is they did it to serve the common good-such an unfashionable concept nowadays. Extreme individualism and ‘me first’ seems so often to trump everything nowadays!

Finally, are we really grateful for those who “gave their tomorrow for our today”? This service does try to put that right.

What is the Christian view of all this? That there are endless conflicts should come as no surprise, for we live in a fallen world. Men and women like us disobey God and reject His authority. Our selfishness makes us prone to hostility to others (I say this as much to myself as anyone else)-we see this in families-there’s aggro-road rage –in the news we see examples of the cruelty of one to another leading even to murder. Each of these exacts a price-be it guilt for wrongdoing or the rupture of trust between humans.

What is God’s remedy for this situation, when the “times are out of joint”? Firstly, He offers us so much: forgiveness if we trust Jesus Christ, when the penalty of and guilt for sin is lifted: in Jesus, He offers us a new nature-the old selfish ‘me’ is replaced by a ‘me’ that is a tiny bit like Jesus Christ-it‘s a slow work of transformation, which will only be completed in Heaven. That’s why, at my funeral, I want the hymn “Love divine, all loves excelling” because of the lines “Finish then thy new creation, pure and spotless let us be”: there’s the promise offered of Jesus’ return, when all wrongs will be put right. Secondly, Jesus has experienced living in this fallen world-He knows what it’s like-He’s been let down by His friends-tortured by His enemies. He is a “man of sorrows, acquainted with grief” so He understands. Thirdly, God commissions Christ’s followers to heal antagonisms, to reconcile those in conflict with each other and to support those who suffer. We should be praying for strength for this task and for peace.

The Beatitudes give us three examples of how this commission can work. In Matt. 5:4 “Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted” promises that, if we mourn over our wrongdoing, so that we turn away from evil rather than trying to write it out of the story, we will be comforted or strengthened. It applies, too, for loss. This can help us, as we live in a fallen world. Matt. 5:9 “blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called the sons of God” may seem unusual. Jesus, however, made peace between mankind and God. If we try to reconcile adversaries rather than stirring up trouble, we will be showing something of Jesus’ character of love. I hope it won’t seem irreverent, but we will be ‘chips off the old block.’ Matt. 5: 7 “Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy” urges us to be merciful in our dealings with others-defusing conflicts. As we’ve been shown mercy by God, so we should show mercy and be grateful for the sacrifices in war done for the common good.

So, in a fallen world, we are reminded in this Remembrance Service to seek God’s remedy-to recall with gratitude those who gave their lives for the common good, hence the Prayer of Commemoration already prayed-to repent for the causes of war and regret for the sufferings involved, which we’ve done, already, with the Act of Penitence. In the Act of Commitment and our prayers for peace we will try to help those suffering from war’s effects and to encourage reconciliation.

To return to my original question-does the Remembrance Service make any difference? I think things would be far worse without it. As human beings we are so prone to being heedlessly forgetful-we need constant reminders of what has been done for us and what we need to do. We must be grateful. We should seek God’s remedy in Jesus for this fallen world and to fulfil our commission to mourn for and turn away from wrong, to be peacemakers and merciful.