



Autumn 2017 – **Remembrance Sunday**
(12 November 2017, Paul Langham)

Reading: Colossians 2:6-15

⁶ So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, ⁷ rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.

⁸ See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world rather than on Christ.

⁹ For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, ¹⁰ and in Christ you have been brought to fullness. He is the head over every power and authority. ¹¹ In him you were also circumcised with a circumcision not performed by human hands. Your whole self ruled by the flesh was put off when you were circumcised by Christ, ¹² having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through your faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead.

¹³ When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, ¹⁴ having cancelled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. ¹⁵ And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

Departed comrade! Thou, redeemed from pain
Shall sleep the sleep that kings desire in vain:
Not thine the sense of loss
But lo, for us the void
That never shall be filled again.
Not thine but ours the grief.
All pain is fled from thee.
And we are weeping in thy stead;
Tears for the mourners who are left behind
Peace everlasting for the quiet dead.

Lucretius (Roman Epicurean philosopher, c. 99 – 55 BC)

The annual cycle of Remembrance ... and its significance

Reading from Lucretius not because of what it teaches, but simply because it reminds us that people have been remembering their war dead for millennia ...

Next year ...

We mainly remember those who gave their lives in the 2 World Wars of the 20th-Century ...

- Casualties in WW1 = over 16 m
- Casualties in WW2 = over 60 m

We remember that they gave their lives to protect peace, establish good and correct evil

Indeed that is one of the criteria used to assess whether a war is 'just' or not.

A Just War is one which has to be fought but is conducted according to certain conditions. Amazingly, these were developed by Thomas Aquinas (c1225-74) and Francisco de Vitoria (c1483-1546) and are still referred to today.

The theory is not intended to justify all wars but to prevent them by showing that going to war – except in certain limited circumstances – is wrong. The intention was to motivate states to find other ways of resolving conflicts, prevent war and to limit its effects.

The conditions of a Just War are:

- it must be fought by a legal recognised authority, e.g., a government
- the cause of the war must be just
- the war must be fought with the intention to establish good or correct evil
- there must be a reasonable chance of success
- the war must be the last resort (after all diplomatic negotiations have been tried and failed)
- only sufficient force must be used and civilians must not be involved

War casualties since 1945 = over 51 m

‘A Beastly Century’ (Margaret Drabble, in an address to the Royal Society of Literature in London, 14 December 2000.)

In reality, of course, it was no more than a human century.

In 1994, the historian Eric Hobsbawm wrote that 187 m people were ‘killed or allowed to die by human decision’ in what he called the ‘short century’ – a period of about 75 years from 1914 to 1991: the beginning of WW1 to the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of its occupation of its Eastern European ‘allies’. However, that figure was short by 44 m for the full 20th-Century, during which approximately 231 m people died in wars and conflict and, in very large numbers, ‘by human decision.’

And what of the 21st-Century?

In 2015, the International Institute for Strategic Studies reported that, despite fewer wars, the number of deaths from conflict had trebled since 2008 due to an ‘inexorable intensification of violence’

2008 – 63 armed conflicts led to 56,000 fatalities

2015 – 42 led to 180,000 fatalities – more than three times as many

The study found the number of displaced people exceeded 50 million in 2013. It warned that civilian populations continue to pay the price of conflicts in short-term dislocation and the longer-term impact of the collapse of government services, particularly education, healthcare and economic development.

The World Bank estimates that 1.2 billion people, roughly one fifth of the world’s population, are affected by some form of violence or insecurity.

Are we not seeing that inexorable intensification of violence, not just in armed conflict or terrorism, but ... everywhere?

Our apparent war, as a species, on the very planet which nurtures and sustains our life

The appalling abuse of power by men over women ... the allegations emerging from Hollywood, Westminster, the world of Sport ... show just how widespread this problem is. What do women have to do to be treated first and foremost as human beings?

Women gave amazing service in both World Wars. But statues around the world are so predominantly male as to be, to all intents and purposes, exclusively so.

E.g. the monument to the women of WW2 unveiled by HM The Queen in July 2005 in Whitehall.

Picture – shows their clothes but not them ...

From <http://www.invisiblewomen.org.uk>

The Story so Far

One argument often raised to excuse gender inequality in civic statues – the invisibility of women – is that women have achieved less; won fewer wars, not come up with so many inventions, been such notable thinkers or political leaders. And there is a truth in that, because how could all but the most exceptional women excel in those fields with the age-old hobble of patriarchy hindering them at every step?

It is an argument that also misses an essential thread of thinking, in that warriors, inventors, scholars and politicians are not the only kinds of people worthy of honouring. It misses all the other areas that women are traditionally skilled in; the work of the social and domestic fabric of our society, without which there would be no society, no family life, no real community. These are the areas that have been and remain conveniently overlooked and underpaid and contribute greatly to the continuing pay gap. How handy to be able to dismiss and devalue as ‘women’s work’ the very essentials of our existence.

And many women who risked their lives were barely commemorated at all ...

Anne Glyn-Jones, who has recently died aged 94, was a telegraphist in Y section – first in Scarborough and then Gibraltar, listening in to enemy communications and sending whatever she found back to the women of Station X (the place we now know as Bletchley Park). All these women, whose work went largely unacknowledged ...

After the war, she went to Oxford, worked for the UN in Geneva – and later as PA, researcher and archivist to Harold Macmillan.

She ended her working life as a research fellow in sociology at Exeter University from 1973 – 1985, during which time I was a student there.

Her 650-page magnum opus, ‘*Holding up a mirror: How Civilisations Decline*’, was published in 1996, and described by the Sunday Times as ‘visionary.’

In 2009, she (and others still alive) finally received a certificate from the government, thanking her for her service. She went to her local charity shop, bought a frame for 30p and hung the certificate in her downstairs loo ...

Gender pay gap?

By the rich over the ordinary ...

Social media’s vitriol, the poison which spews forth given anonymity ...

Just war ... clarity

Today, things are not clear

- although you can understand women making their allegations to the press rather than the police if their experience has taught them the police will not listen – we must beware slipping into a situation where people are no longer regarded as innocent until proven guilty
- we must also surely decry the self-righteous comments and behaviour, particularly of other powerful men in Hollywood who must have known but did ... nothing
- It's instinctual to allow outrage to rule when Papers are leaked from Paradise – but again, things aren't always as clear: so much of what is going on is the result of our labyrinthine tax system
- Those who've jumped on the bandwagon to condemn everyone from the Queen to Mrs Brown's boys might want to look to their own affairs
 - The Labour Party rents its London HQ from a tax-exempt property trust based in Jersey
 - The Guardian used a tax-exempt shell company based in the Caymans to purchase the media group Emap.
- It may still be true that, in the words of Somerset Maugham, Monaco is a sunny place for shady people

We're a world at war ...

What's the antidote ...?

Colombia, Simon Reeve ... <https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/b08n5flh/colombia-with-simon-reeve>

A country torn apart by conflict between left-wing guerrilla movement known as FARC, the government, and right-wing paramilitaries funded by wealthy landowners and even multinational companies to protect their own interests.

- At over 50 years, it was the longest running conflict in the Western hemisphere
- Over 200,000 died – roughly half of whom were 'disappeared'
- To this day, Colombia has more internally displaced people than any other country in the world – at some 7m
- Medellin, the centre of Pablo Escobar's Drugs Cartel, was for decades one of the most dangerous cities on earth, with over 6000 murders a year.
- Today, the death rate is down 90%, as the city authorities have worked to reduce poverty and connect the various communities to one another.

One restaurant owner intentionally employs wounded soldiers and former guerrilla fighters. Simon Reeve interviewed 3 of them – a former soldier who lost a leg and an eye to a landmine planted by FARC, a member of FARC and a former RW paramilitary ... the soldier said:

We have to leave behind the bitterness and all the damage the war has done to us ... but the price of peace is forgiveness ...

Incredibly powerful words

We live in a world at war – weapons proliferate and are used with ever more brutal disregard for life.

What can stop it? Only one thing can achieve lasting peace ... forgiveness. It's the most powerful weapon we can wield.

As Christians, we have the model of that forgiveness in Jesus and his weapon to end all war – the Cross. Let me read those verses from Colossians again, in my own translation:

Colossians 2:6-15

⁶ You've made a great start, accepting Jesus as king, so let him shape your lives. ⁷ Put down deep roots into him and build on his solid ground as he strengthens your faith and your hearts overflow with gratitude to God.

⁸ Don't fall victim to those who peddle empty promises. All human thinking and philosophy, no matter how impressive, builds on sand rather than on the solid rock of Jesus.

⁹ Jesus is the physical expression of the full nature, character, power and glory of God. ¹⁰ You've been made complete in him, the ultimate power and authority. ¹¹ Jesus transforms you by cutting away your old life, something you couldn't do for yourself.

¹² Baptism is a wonderful symbol of what Jesus accomplished. You 'act out' his death and burial when you go under the water, joining him in the grave and dying to your old self. Then you burst up out of the water into your new life in Jesus, confident that the very power God exerted to raise him from the dead is now at work in you.

¹³ This is the heart of what God has done for you. You were finished, lifeless, without a hope or a prayer, but God has raised you to new life with Jesus, forgiving our sins. ¹⁴ The Law, with its rules and regulations, accused us at every turn, daubing our sins like graffiti for all to see. But God has erased it all, called time on the Law and nailed every accusation to the cross through the body of his Son. ¹⁵ The cross took the powers of darkness by complete surprise, destroying their weapons. Like a conquering general, Jesus paraded them as prisoners of war for all to see. That's the power of the cross.

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER THOUGHT

If some people are able to forgive so much in pursuit of peace, why am I sometimes unable to forgive relatively little things?

Invite the Holy Spirit to show you the reality of forgiveness in your own life – how deep does it go? Is there anyone you need to forgive? What makes forgiveness hard?

Remember the words Jesus spoke immediately after teaching his disciples how to pray:

⁹ *'This, then, is how you should pray:*

*"Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,*

¹⁰ *your kingdom come,
your will be done,*

on earth as it is in heaven.

¹¹ *Give us today our daily bread.*

¹² *And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.*

¹³ *And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one."*

¹⁴ *For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. ¹⁵ But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.*

Matthew 6

Paul Langham, November 2017