

A simple service of thanksgiving and commemoration for Remembrance Sunday was livestreamed from York Minster on Sunday 8 November.Â

The Archbishop's Remembrance Sermon follows:Â

No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. (John 15. 13)

Some years ago there was a television advertisement that tried to sell a certain sort of insurance by telling us that security was the most basic human instinct. To illustrate this the advert featured the Great Wall of China, telling us "though this may not actually be true" that it is the only human structure that can be seen from space.

A wall, is of course primarily built for security, but what this really means is protection from each other. To mark out territory. To keep others out. Donald Trump got elected in 2016 on the promise to build one. It is indeed a basic human instinct. But is it the most basic? Isn't it rather a sign of our failure to love each other, not just our need to be secure.

As we remember all those who died because of the failures that ended in war and as we consider the growing divisions and binary arguments and fake news and hate speech that separate us from each other in our world today, how can we establish peace? And where should our allegiances lie? To those whose side of the wall we happen to share? Or to those who care for peace so much that they are prepared to tear walls down?

I also note that this Remembrance Sunday we are all separated from each other and not able to gather for worship, fellowship and support in the ways we would wish. This second lockdown is going to be hard. However, although we must abide by the law and do all that we can to stay safe and support our Health Service, we also need a vision for peace and health which is beyond warfare and divisions and can even begin to see what a different, more peaceful and collaborative world might look like beyond the horrors of Covid 19. We also pray this for our sisters and brothers in the US as their election concludes and for a peaceful transition of power.

Such a vision is given us in Christ. Working for this vision and letting our communion with God inspire and equip us, is the best way of honouring those who died to secure our peace and whose sacrifice we remember today, and the best way of building a different sort of world.

When someone is baptised into the household of the Christian Church, as the sign of the cross is made on their forehead, this prayer is said by the congregation:

Fight valiantly as a disciple of Christ against sin the world and the devil and remain faithful to Christ to the end of your life.

This is a modern version of the Prayer Book which says, "Do not be ashamed to confess the faith of Christ crucified and to fight under his banner..."

Those who prepare the services for the Church of England today prefer the language of disciple to soldier, but the image is essentially the same; it is taken from an ancient military ceremony where colours are presented and laid before the altar. Just as a soldier fights under the banner of their regiment, whose colours march ahead and whose presence raise morale, so a Christian lives their life under the banner of Christ.

What is this banner? It is the cross. The sign of peace. But not that peace which little more than an empty truce – the silence after the guns have stopped firing – but true reconciliation painfully embraced – something worth dying for.

On the cross Jesus confronts the hate and anger, disease and divisions of the world. And he does it with love. He receives the worst the world can give. And he goes on loving. He lays down his life for his friends. He asks us to do the same.

The God of Jesus Christ is a barrier breaker, tombstone roller, barricade buster God. Sins forgiven. Those who are separated are brought together. Enemies even become friends.

For, if the Great Wall of China is the only human work that can be seen on earth as if it were from heaven, then the only human work that can be seen in heaven from earth are the wounds of Christ.

The wounds that we made when we tried to get rid of love.

The wounds that are themselves the sign of barriers broken down.

If we want to know the truest human instinct, then we must look to Christ. For he shows us that it is not security, but community that brings us peace; not alienation, but forgiveness; not conquest, but sacrifice.

None of us wants to have to fight for these things. And war must always be a very last resort. And politicians must learn wisdom and restraint, for it is not them who go into battle. And better than anyone, if you want to know about the horrors of war, ask a soldier. And every war begins with human greed and human failure. But as we gather today for this annual remembrance of those whose lives were lost in war, we make this remembrance by declaring our allegiance to God, the God who is revealed in Jesus Christ. It is under his banner that we march, and it is he, and he alone, who can secure the peace we long for. Let us look beyond ourselves, beyond other ties of school or family or class or caste, or even nation, beyond this pandemic, to that other country – whose fortress is a faithful heart and whose paths are paths of peace.

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The Service of Thanksgiving and Commemoration for Remembrance Sunday

The service will be livestreamed from 10.30am on Sunday 8 November.Â

Prayers offered for the Royal Navy, the British Army, the Royal Air Force, Veterans, the Royal British Legion York and the City of York.

Documents

- [A Service of Commemoration on Remembrance Sunday](#) (160.08 KB)

5 min read

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