

## REMEMBERING IN A TIME OF WAR

Jonah 3. 1-5, 10  
Hebrews 9. 24-28  
Mark 1. 14-20

I speak to you in the name of  the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.  
Amen.

One hundred years ago, at the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month, the guns fell silent, bringing to an end the First World War. Our nation and commonwealth have recalled that moment through our Armistice and Remembrance events down the decades; decades during which the men and women of our armed forces have continued to pay the ultimate sacrifice. As we stand here today to remember lives sacrificed in the service of our country, and those traumatised and injured in conflict, we pray that we will have such a devotion to justice and freedom; so that the heroism of all who fought (and that of those who still fight) may continue to be remembered in a nation of service and a world of peace.

On this important day, we might well ask ourselves how the appointed scripture readings have any relation to Remembrance Sunday. For example, in the text taken from the Old Testament, we are reminded how Jonah was given a message to deliver to Nineveh, that ancient Assyrian capital located in Upper Mesopotamia. Jonah tried his best not to deliver that message, but he finally did so. It was a short sermon, one that was only eight words long: 'Forty days more, and Nineveh will be overthrown!' Poor Jonah ended up in Nineveh, proclaiming its destruction.

Now, it is not clear why Jonah attempted to run away from his divine mission. Was he afraid that his message would not be heard, and that he himself would suffer? The Assyrians had a reputation for cruelty, even by the standards of a cruel era. Or was he afraid that his message would be heard, and that the Assyrians would repent,

and that God would change his mind? We do not know. But one thing is clear: the message that Jonah was given to deliver was an unpopular message, even if it was one that the Assyrians needed to hear.

And take our gospel reading from St Mark. We read that as our Lord came to Galilee, he announced that the kingdom of God was near and recruited followers. On the face of it, Jesus's proclamation of the good news seems to be totally different to the fire-and-brimstone proclamation of Jonah; and yet things are actually more complex than they seem. At the beginning of our passage, we learn that John the Baptist, despite (or perhaps because of) his great popularity and influence with the general public, has been arrested and imprisoned by the King. This is certainly a sign of a political clamp-down on wandering preachers with unpopular messages. In proclaiming his message, Christ is running a risk. His proclamation is not a wise action. His message is not a popular one, either; but it is one which is necessary.

When we look at these two stories from scripture, we see why Remembrance Sunday is too important to be abandoned, or to be allowed to wither away. Remembrance Sunday is a day when the Church (and those outside of Church) have the chance to tell the truth about war. The truth about war is a very important message, even if it is not a popular one.

There are, of course, a number of different views about war. There are those who will defend the concept of a just war; there are those who see it sometimes as the best option, because all the others are worse; there are those who absolutely oppose all war; and there are probably a range of views somewhere in between. But all will agree (and Remembrance Sunday reminds us) that war is costly. This message is not a popular one, but it is a necessary one.

In remembering the cost of war, we commemorate the men and women who left town and village, church and chapel, to fight and die; or sometimes as nurses and non-combatants of various kinds, still to die. In remembering the cost of war, we also remember those mothers and fathers, those wives and sweethearts, who were damaged and destroyed by what happened to their loved ones; not to mention the children who were similarly affected.

On Remembrance Sunday, we have the opportunity (and duty) to proclaim how terrible a thing war is. In so doing, we do not deny the necessity of war, nor do we deny the bravery and sacrifice of those who died. Rather, we do the very opposite. On Remembrance Sunday we remember that sacrifice and its cost.

The Gospel of our Lord is a Gospel of Peace; and we who are his messengers, we who proclaim the good news, must proclaim it as a message of peace and of love. As we remind ourselves of the cost of war, we must pledge ourselves to the cause of peace and of reconciliation.

On Remembrance Sunday, we are called to remember that the cost of war has not just been borne by ourselves. It has also been borne by others. The cost of war falls heavily on every side. The sacrifice that we commemorate and proclaim falls equally on us and on those who were our enemies. In remembering the evil of war in the context of a God of love, we must claim that love for all humanity, and not just for ourselves.

Amen.