

Remembrance Sunday

What do we remember at Remembrance Sunday? I think many people remember different things. The date is still on the Sunday before the 11th of November, Armistice Sunday, even though many of us do not have active memories of the 1st World War. But more of us remember the 2nd World War. The Netherlands were neutral during the 1st World War, and were not involved in the conflict at all, and many people thought that they could stay neutral in the 2nd World War too, until we were invaded by Hitler's troops, the reality of war became real.

But since then there have been many wars. One of the wars that the Netherlands fought was leading up to the independence of Indonesia. The people of Indonesia saw that after defeating the Japanese, why not go for total independence, and yes they were right.

But since then there have been many wars, smaller and larger ones, Vietnam, Sebrenica, the Gulf War, and recently the fight against ISIS. But the remarkable difference is that these wars have always been fought on foreign territory and have only involved the armed forces, but not the general population in the UK, Europe or the USA. We seem to be used to fighting wars away from us for our defence, but how do the people think who live there of us? As liberators or oppressors?

Peace

Jesus and the New Testament does not say much about war. He warns his disciples that there will be wars, but he does not explicitly say what to do as Christians in a war. But what Jesus does speak a lot about is peace. So some Christian communities like the Bruderhof (near here in Nunnington) have come into being as their founders did not want to take part in the war that their nation fought and they had to flee. Although we may not feel called to be part of these communities, Jesus does call us to be peacemakers ("Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God", Matt 5:9) as we have seen at the beginning of our journey through the Jesus' sermon on the mount. And if you listen to the Sermon of the Mount, then you will notice that Jesus advocates his disciple how to live in a society of peace, with God at the

centre, and that because of their living, the society that does not have God in the centre will be transformed. I will just list the headings in my NIV translation as a summary of what we have already covered: The beatitudes, Salt and Light, The fulfilment of the Law, Murder, Adultery, Divorce, Oaths, An eye for an eye (not), Love your enemies, Giving to the needy, Prayer, Fasting, Treasures in Heaven, Do not worry, Judging others, and we are not yet finished: as now we read Ask, Seek and Knock.

With these instructions Jesus tells us how to live in the Kingdom of God, the Kingdom that is here (as Jesus is with us through his Holy Spirit) but also the Kingdom that is not yet (as we are awaiting Jesus's second coming). But what would it look like? Linda chose a passage from Revelations this morning for our Remembrance part of the service: Eden restored. A society that exists with God living in their midst. The throne of God and the Lamb, the river flowing from that into the city, the tree of life, which leaves are for the healing of the nations. They will see his face and they will serve him. There is no darkness, no night, no curse, no war, no evil. God then lives on earth with us.

Wow.... So this is the Kingdom of God in its fullest...

What are we asking for

But what does it mean to live in the Kingdom of God. For that we return to the Sermon of the Mount. Jesus tells us here that we can ask for anything in prayer. In the Jewish tradition terms for seeking and knocking are other terms for prayer, but they indicate a persistence and ongoing relationship with God. They speak of an intimacy with God. Petitioning parliament is a real formal process. What do you think would happen if we would go seeking in Downing Street and knocking on the door of No 10? We would be forcibly removed and may even end up in jail! But not with God. Jesus invites us to come knocking on his door, to seek him out, and to ask him for things.

Using the setting of a family, Jesus then illustrates that we as evil human beings give good things to our children, surely God will give us good gifts.

But what then are we asking for? Is it like Christmas, with God being a super Santa Claus with a huge red and white stripy sock and everything that we ever wanted comes out of that? No, because we also have the experience of not (yet) answered prayer.

What is then that we are asking for? It is OK for kids to get everything they wanted? The latest Xbox, Nintendo, Iphone? It does seem that way in today's society, but is it good for them? It may be what they want, but is it what they

need? What they do need is bread and fish, food and drink and a home and a stable place to live, schooling and education. And some of that they need they would never ask for, if it was up to them.

What God wants for us is not necessarily what we want or ask for. In the context of a family, the parents also know what is good for their kids, and that maybe some things are not good at all or some things are not good for them yet, as they need to mature before they can use it safely.

And sometimes as Christians we want opposing things. Some of us wanted Brexit, some of us not. Some of us pray for Trump to win, others for Biden. All of us pray against Covid-19, but God may let this happen so that many more would be given a change to turn to him.

Some of us pray for parking spaces and find them, and others pray for healing and don't seem to receive it. Are we then not praying hard enough, or right enough? Doesn't Jesus say that we just have to ask and it will be given to us? So, yes, some of this is a mystery, and I do not know why God does not heal or give in certain circumstances.

But in the end our lives are finite. Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, to demonstrate his glory... but Lazarus was a young man, and although we do not know from the Bible, we can assume that he has had various illnesses and that he died.

So the question is still valid, I think. What do we ask for? And is what we ask for also the will of God for us?

Luke extends the phrase of Jesus to end, 'how much more will your Father in heaven give you the **Holy Spirit** to those who ask him'.

So maybe we should ask him for his Holy Spirit. But that will change us, and do we want to change? Do we really want to be part of the workers of the Kingdom, or do we prefer to be beneficiaries only?

Because if we want to be workers in God's Kingdom, what then would we ask for here in St Andrews? A vision and plan for God's work for us in Littlebourne, or here in Canterbury? A vision and plan for healing prayer ministry so more people can have their relationship with God restored? Praying for Oasis Cafe, that it will be a real Oasis, where people meet the people of God and through them they meet God? Praying for practical and spiritual gifts to enable this work to be done. Praying for faith that we are doing God's work?

These are very specific prayer requests for our growth, for our purpose in God's Kingdom. Praying for peace in the UK, in the nations around us in the world. Praying that Jesus will return and that he will establish the prophecy of Revelations 22... Do we ask for that? Do we really want to ask for that? Are we really praying for God to establish his Kingdom here on earth and do we really ask him how we can help and offer that to him?

Or do we have our own agendas and objectives.

Golden Rule

Jesus finishes this section with a different kind of exhortation: "do to others what you would have them do to you" (v12). In Jesus worldview we are never alone in relationship with Jesus. We are always in relation with him together with others. So as we ask for ourselves, we should ask for others. As we work for ourselves, we should work for others. As we love ourselves, we should love others. Jesus does not make this a passive statement: it is not "do not to others what you do not want others to do to you". That is about limiting our actions. No this is active: Do to others what you want them to do to you. It is about doing more things than less. It is about actively looking after each other and looking after others not of our community. In prayer and in action.

So as we ask for ourselves we are encouraged to ask for others. And as we work for ourselves, we are asked to work for others. God's Kingdom is not only about a personal relationship with God. Because as soon as we have that, God directs us to establish personal relationships with each other.

Let us therefore pray for that and for each other.