

Homily for Remembrance Sunday 10 November 2024 at Holy Trinity Church,
Geneva – **10.30am**

Why remember?

Texts: Micah 4.1-5; Psalm 46; Romans 8.18-25 (9am only); John 15.9-17

In Jewish homes, at the Passover Seder, the youngest child traditionally asks four questions, The first of these is, “Why is this night different from all other nights?”. The questions are a catalyst – inviting those present both to share their collective memory of what has happened in the past, when God saved his people from slavery in Egypt, and helping them to think about the significance of this for the present.

Today, as we gather together for Remembrance Sunday, it’s appropriate that we too ask what we are doing in this act of commemoration. I would like to suggest that we are doing four things which lead us from the past to the future.

First, we are remembering with profound gratitude, humility and reverence, the sacrifice made by so many both in last two World Wars and also in subsequent conflicts so that we might live in peace and in freedom. We remember today, former members of our families as well our armed forces from so many countries, who fought, at enormous cost, that we might enjoy peace and freedom today.

Second, we are also remembering what we have learnt about the nature of war, particularly in the last century. One of most painful and yet most profound points which became clear as the First World War developed, was that the rhetoric of war as an opportunity to make a glorious and heroic sacrifice, which had been used by many in power including church leaders, to persuade young men to offer their lives for their country, did not stand up in the face of that war. Faced with the grim reality of trench warfare, the death of millions of young men to gain small areas of land and fact that for the first time, war could now reach and affect the lives of civilians as well as soldiers, meant that people came to understand that war was not a heroic adventure but glimpsed its true horror and terrible cost.

Coupled with this, there was also a growing realisation that war was never a ‘good’ solution but something which at times would be the *only* solution because of our weakness and sinfulness as human beings. William Temple, who was Archbishop of Canterbury during part of the Second World War expressed

this poignantly. Although he supported the government's decision to go to war against the Nazis, he wrote this:

' We recognise that this is all to do with the sin in which we are all implicated so that the best thing we can do ('i.e. go to war)is still a bad thing.'

Third, we are called today to remember because there is remedy against our human sin and this involves turning our attention from ourselves to God. Our Bible readings, psalm, anthem and prayers remind us that God is pure love. He is not distant from humanity, leaving us to face the terrible consequences of our sins and failures. No – God is love, we are made in his image and He loves us passionately, longing for us to find the way to regain our true humanity.

Although we have marred that image through our selfishness and pride, God offers us a path of hope, He commands us to love one another. God can make that command to us because He himself has lived it out in its most perfect and costly way. Through His Son Jesus Christ, he has shown us a different way of living together based not on fighting each other to further our self-interests but instead, by seeking the welfare and flourishing of all. Our calling as women and men, girls and boys, made in his image, is to strive for that world where we can live together in peace, where we can find a way to turn our swords into ploughshares, and overcome our divisions so that all can flourish. In doing this, we will find our true humanity.

Finally, rooted in the assurance of God's love, we remember today, so instead succumbing to despair in the face of the brokenness and bitter conflicts in our world today, we ourselves become agents of hope. Although this can feel very hard, we know that this is *God's* world, not ours, and that in him, change is always possible, Remember too that it is from those times and places of deepest darkness, that true hope and new life can break forth.

I'd like to end by sharing with you an example of this. It is the story of Brother Roger, who as a young man was struck by the bitter conflicts that existed even between Protestant and Catholics in his community in Switzerland. As the storm clouds of war gathered in the late 1930s, he felt called to create a new Christian community which would bring together people of different denominations. Despite the risk, he and a colleague crossed from their native Switzerland in 1940 to found the community in Taizé, a village in Burgandy near the line of demarcation that divided Vichy France from the area under Nazi occupation. They offered hospitality to political refugees particularly Jews. They were forced to flee in 1942 because of Nazi raids but returned after the war to build up the community. From its small beginnings, the Taizé Community has grown

and flourished, bringing together people across the world, especially the young from radically different countries and traditions, building up mutual understanding and becoming an icon of light and hope.

Towards the end of this service, our young people will ask us three questions:

1. *Will you strive for all that makes for peace?*
2. *Will you seek to heal the wounds of war?*
3. *Will you work for a just future for all humanity?*

Each of us has the potential to do this. Today, we are called to use our act of remembering so that we too can bear fruits – committing ourselves to do whatever lies in our power, whether great or small, to help make the world a more peaceful, loving place both now and for all who will follow us.

Amen

The Revd Canon Dr Daphne Green