

WELCOME

Welcome today as we reflect on this Remembrance Day where we are invited to contemplate at least two things. First, sadness, sympathy and respect for those who are directly scarred or involved in the tragedy of war. Second, shame and horror for what we have done to one another.

TWO MINUTES SILENCE

OPENING PRAYER

Lord, help us to see this day to as a sign-post directing the paths of all nations towards peace, and reminding all of us of the awful sacrifice and inhumanity of war. Help us to be a more loving world, caring for one another in peace. **Amen**

HYMN Be thou my vision (Lockdown Legacy)

READING

Matthew 25:1-13 NIV: The Parable of the Ten Virgins

At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish and five were wise. The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. The wise ones, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep. "At midnight the cry rang out: 'Here's the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!'" "Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish ones said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.'" "No," they replied, "there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.'" "But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut. "Later the others also came. 'Lord, Lord,' they said, 'open the door for us!'" "But he replied, 'Truly I tell you, I don't know you.'" "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.

REFLECTION:

I asked my youngest daughter aged 23 what she thought about Remembrance Day Services and I have to say I was surprised by her answer. I had assumed that the 2nd WW was so long before her birth that it would mean little to her. How wrong I was! "It's really important", she said, "We need to keep the stories alive for all those who died and suffered for our freedoms. Without their sacrifice our world may be a very different place, we could all be living under Nazi rule. You and me and all our family, might not be alive as our great grandmother was a Spanish Gypsy and would no doubt be have been killed along with all the Jewish people".

We will all have had, perhaps very distantly, people in our families effected by wars. Then there are all the civilians who died throughout the world, due to bombings or the millions who starved in Bengal. Not through natural disaster, but through political decisions.

In our own day war continues and we see the tragedy of those fleeing from conflict zones around the world. Exploited by people smugglers they risk the channel in flimsy plastic boats, with sometimes as in recent days tragic consequences.

Indeed, over the past decade we have seen the so-called War on Terror impacting our own shores, with the bombing of young people at the Manchester Arena as just one example. And then of course there is Covid, described by many as a war effecting the whole world. This time an unseen enemy.

So how are we as Christians to respond to these dark times, where loss, grief and fear impact our daily lives?

Well I guess we need to be honest with ourselves and God and acknowledge the pain, sadness and sometimes anger that may accompany grief and loss. Even Jesus cried out on the cross, "My God, my God why have you forsaken me?"

When we are saddened for all those who have lost their lives whether due to war or Covid. or grieving for the loss of our way of life, seeing our loved ones, losing jobs and income, meeting together, hugging, let us remember, words from Psalm 34:18 "The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit".

As we travel through this Pandemic, I am sure like me you will have experienced times of exhaustion with it all. I just don't want to hear any more sad statistics and decide I need to turn my brain off and go outside and enjoy the trees or have a cup of tea and smile at Strictly Come Dancing. I guess it is the equivalent of the guests in our Gospel passage which describes the sleepiness that spreads through the community as the people become tired of waiting for the Bridegroom, that is for a time of renewal and joy. But note the whole community becomes tired, it is normal it is ok.

What is important in this passage is the lamp and the oil. The lamp reminds us of Jesus' invitation to be the light of the world, the lamp not hidden under a bushel but shining brightly on a hill, helping the lost find their way in the dark. Just as our lives should shine for others and help them find their way.

The lamp however needs oil to continue to shine: it is the oil used to keep watch for and welcome the Bridegroom, who is of course Christ, the light of the world.

Oil is also what the Good Samaritan uses to heal the wounds of the man beaten down by life and Mary used to anoint the feet of Jesus to consecrate Him as the Messiah, the one who comes to save and heal us all.

We also need this oil, because there are times in life when there are things that we alone are called to do that no one else can do for us. It is our task, to face this situation. It may be holding the hands of a loved one ill or dying, it may be speaking kind words to the person in distress we meet as we do our shopping, the questioning of why me at times of pain from a family member. It may be our own dark times facing loss, death, change, the difficulties of life. We will all encounter at some time in our lives situations that we must be prepared for because there won't be another opportunity.

Like the wise virgins we need to know in dark times where to find our oil so we can light our lamps again and shed light into situations.

And of course, we find our oil in our love of God and Jesus, in the times of prayer and worship that have sustained us over the years and the real knowledge of the presence of the Bridegroom we have experienced.

So, let us not put our lamps away in a closet but have them on hand and lit, even if the world says that it's foolish and pointless. Let us be a people of hope, of healing, of light in these dark times and as the hymn says Give us oil in our lamps keep us burning, Give us oil in our lamps we pray! Amen

HYMN: HOPE FOR THE WORLD'S DESPAIR

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

Almighty and eternal God, from whose love in Christ we cannot be parted, either by death or life: hear our prayers and thanksgivings for all whom we remember this day; fulfil in them the purpose of your love; and bring us all, with them, to your eternal joy; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

God of truth and justice, we hold before you those men and women who have died in active service all over this world. As we honour their courage and cherish their memory, may we put our faith in your future; for you are the source of life and hope, now and for ever.

We pray for all who suffer in body mind and spirit, that they may know the oil of your healing love. Help us your people to keep our lamps shining in the darkness, that we may be people who hold out hope, welcome, healing and love by your power and in your name.

More so than ever there is a need to remember in the midst of this pandemic that we are all called to find ways, even in our current restrictions, to offer prayers and forms of service, to lament pain, death, and anxiety; to give thanks for the courage and generous spirit of care that is transforming our communities; and to pray to the God who sustains us. Help us to be people who offer the hope of renewal and restoration.

We take a moment to remember before you those known to us personally who need your love and healing, bless them and show them the truth of our living God.

We ask that you receive our prayers in the name of Christ our friend and Lord. **Amen**

THE PEACE

The Lord keep you and shield you, a very present help in trouble. The peace of the Lord be always with you.

And also with you.

THE BLESSING

The Lord keep you close to his heart, the Lord gather you into his arms, the Lord lead you into paths of peace. And the blessings of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit remain with you and all whom you love. **Amen**