

Reflection 1 *Blessed by God – are those who work for peace* Matthew 5:9

For me, this past week has been overshadowed by uncertainties over the final result of the US Presidential election: the United States has been bitterly divided & disunited as the current President has tried to throw petrol onto bitterness, prejudice & resentment. & as every country struggles with global pandemic, future working together for wider good & for peace may well take 2nd place to the personal interests & egos of populist leaders. And perhaps in this country also, people now are more divided: weary and cynical about working together.

At least 2 other problems on Remembrance Sunday:

- 1) **Is it glorification of war?** After all, for hundreds of years, Christian Chaplains on opposing sides have blessed armies & prayed for success. It must worry us that GW Bush said that his God had led him to launch the invasion of Iraq in 2003 - even though there was no evidence of weapons of mass destruction nor had the US made any real plans about how to establish peace in Iraq after Saddam. And 19 years after allied overthrow of Taliban in Afghanistan & loss of many lives, no nearer peace there either. But don't blame Christ for that.
- 2) **What is the "peace" we pray for?** Sometimes, Church is seen to be about . peace at any price. A passive rolling over, not defending yourself & instant forgiveness. In the Old Testament, the prophet Jeremiah warned against those religious leaders who dress the wounds of God's people as though their greed, self-centredness and turning away from God and his directions for our living does not matter. Jesus does not expect us to ignore justice - Just as when, on the cross, Jesus did not say that He forgave his abusers but actually said, "*Father, forgive them.*" It is ultimately God who does the forgiving.

Forgiveness is an attitude and a process and a decision to take, & it may take time. We need to live a life in which we love & care, have a forgiving attitude & strive for peace. Then the letting go & forgiving will come.

Why do some of us today wear red poppies? although it has been a struggle to buy them this year. **Red** not white or green but blood red like the poppies that emerged in the blood spattered muddy, battlegrounds, of the 1st World War; in what was left of fields & villages churned up by dynamite & months of heavy bombardment when the fighting stopped for a while or moved on.

Poppies became the symbol of the British Legion & a reminder today of those who fought for freedom & died – in world wars & in recent conflicts. Gave their lives, their todays, for our tomorrows. Just as today, we also remember those who health and care workers esp., who have put their lives at risk to care for the sick.

What other symbols help us remember important things?

Photo albums, plaques, gravestones, souvenirs from family holidays, heirlooms.

In the Church, remembering is important – memories that can give us hope and confidence for the future: The **Cross - bread & wine in communion**

The **Bible is full of instructions to remember**, eg, Jewish tradition of Passover – 12 big stones at side of Jordan river taken from middle, one by each tribe- Joshua 3, & later, Abbeys & Cathedrals in Middle Ages & the timeless immensity of God ... and so many big Churches built in 1800s – why?

Remembering helps us understand who we now are and to help us go forward, read Isaiah 43:1ff – *God our maker says to His people, “Do not be afraid for I am with you. I have called you by you by name, I have given myself for you. I love you and I am with you – whatever you face or go through.”* and 2 Corinthians 5: 14-20 – *“Once we grasp / realise / accept that Christ died on the cross for you and me that we may be set free to know life and love of God, then that love should rule our lives and the way that we see other people and relate to them.... We are called to be Christ’s ambassadors bringing good news of the peace that He offers.*

What then does *peace* look & feel like?

When Bible talks about *peace*, it always refers to not just absence of war but *shalom* – justice, peace, healing, forgiveness & mercy. & being able to live at peace with ourselves, with others and with God.

Peace is not just the absence of trouble but the presence of God. Jn 14:28ff

Jesus knew loss & sadness – He wept at the death of Lazarus (Jn 11) & over Jerusalem (Lk 19); Jesus in Matthew chap 22 & in the message given to John in Revelation 21 & 22 as well as passages like Psalm 23 & Micah 4 help us to remember that there will be a time when there will be no more pain or conflict.

We have an eternal hope & even when we feel despair & grief, we are not alone.
...May Christ help us to see others as God sees them – with love –
.. & may we go forward **with God** & work for peace.

Close with words of Abraham Lincoln’s 2nd Inaugural Address one month before he died:
With malice toward none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation’s wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle, & for his widow, & his orphan – to do all which may achieve and cherish a just, and a lasting peace, among ourselves, and with all nations.

end with prayer said together:

Lord, lead me from death to life, from falsehood to truth.

Lead me from despair to hope, from fear to trust.

Lead me from hate to love, from war to peace.

Risen Lord Jesus, may Your peace fill our hearts, our world, our universe. AMEN