

Remembrance Sunday 2018 9am

Everyone suddenly burst out singing;
And I was filled with such delight
As prisoned birds must find in freedom,
Winging wildly across the white
Orchards and dark-green fields; on--on--and out of sight.

Everyone's voice was suddenly lifted;
And beauty came like the setting sun:
My heart was shaken with tears; and horror
Drifted away ... O, but Everyone
Was a bird; and the song was wordless; the singing will never be done.

This poem, perhaps Siegfried Sassoon's most famous, was written around the time of the signing of the armistice in November 1918. It is in that sense of **freedom** that the poem has such resonance. Sassoon himself had fought bravely during the war – almost recklessly. It was whilst he was receiving treatment for shell shock at Craiglockheart Hospital near Edinburgh, that he met Wilfred Owen, also undergoing treatment. There he encouraged Owen's writing of poetry. I don't know if anyone has read Pat Barker's fine novel 'Regeneration' but it is a powerful imagining of this period in both men's lives. Owen, whose place as a war poet subsequently eclipsed that of his mentor largely through Sassoon's own promotion of Owen's work, returned to France and was killed just one week before the Armistice was signed. It is believed that 'Everyone sang' was written before Sassoon heard of Owen's death – which provides it with added poignancy.

The poem seeks to capture an image of freedom - freedom from the carnage of that Great War which afflicted such loss on the families of Europe and beyond. The horrors of gas warfare, of going 'over the top', of armies fighting year by year over a few miles of land devastated by trench warfare - of countless deaths founded on the naked ambitions of power and world domination..... all this, Sassoon imagines having come to an end, and yet, as we know, a mere twenty-one years later the start of the Second World War saw an even greater catastrophe for humanity.

When one looks at the various memorials in our church, particularly regarding those who died in warfare, it is hard not to be drawn into speculating on the names recorded. Around the village this year we have details of some of them, with faded sepia photographs. For each there will be precious memories of lives cut short in their prime, although we ourselves may have much knowledge of the details. There will have been parents, siblings and loved ones whose lives were touched and altered through experience of loss - a whole community with shared grief at such waste.

In thinking of the catastrophe of war and the human losses entailed, what can be said in terms of our response as the Church of God in this 21st century?

The reading we heard today from the Letter to the Hebrews is a vivid work, a masterpiece of early Christian writing which celebrates the person and work of Jesus Christ. It weaves, in an extraordinary way, the whole of Biblical history into the Grace given to humanity through sacrificial love revealed through the Lord's passion, death and resurrection. I suppose in some ways, this imagery may strike us as alien to much of what we know and experience in our everyday lives, focussing, as it does partly on the worship of the Temple in Jerusalem. And yet, what this passage seeks to reassure us is that what is found in Jesus is **true** life. His sacrifice was a transformational moment for humanity, which links God with us in a way which leads us to the knowledge that God is with us – both in life and death.

The narrative of the Good News of Jesus Christ provides each one of us with the understanding of a journey of love open to the whole of humanity. Our own church building leads us on this journey through imagery and the sacramental life we participate in together. Let me provide four signs in which the perfection of God's love for each one of us is revealed. First, the ultimate identification of our human flesh in the face of Jesus Christ, born of a young woman. The death of the Lord on the cross for each and every one of us – a selfless gift of love- transforming our relationship with God through Christ's Resurrection and our call to Resurrection Life.

In the gathering around the altar – the table of the Lord – we are reminded, that - as Paul wrote - 'Because there is one bread, we who are many are **one** body, because we all share in the one bread.'¹ Through the Eucharist, the divine meal, **we** are **united** with the whole company of heaven- the departed and glorified- together with our Christian brothers and sisters throughout the world. Through the Eucharist, we enter the heart of our faith through communion with our Loving God and Saviour through the power of the Holy Spirit, as Jesus calls each of us with the insistent words of love, 'Come, follow me.' This is our strengthening to go out into the world to reveal this transformation to which all are called.

On this Remembrance Sunday, as we give thanks for those who sacrificed themselves for the causes of justice and freedom - for you and for me - my prayer is that we, like them, may continue to lead others to sing that song of freedom which Sassoon wrote of. May that 'wordless song' revealed through the peace found in Christ, continue to be revealed by us to all whom we meet and indeed to all people of good will, and let us strive to ensure that 'the singing will never be done.'

Amen.

¹ 1Cor.10:17.



The Thiepval Memorial to the Missing of the Somme – war memorial to 72,337 missing British and South African servicemen who died in the Battles of the Somme of the First World War and whose bodies were never found. Monument designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens

Jonah 3: 1-5

The word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time, saying, 'Get up, go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim to it the message that I tell you.' So Jonah set out and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly large city, a three days' walk across. Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's walk. And he cried out, 'Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!' And the people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast, and everyone, great and small, put on sackcloth.

Hebrews 9: 24-end

For Christ did not enter a sanctuary made by human hands, a mere copy of the true one, but he entered into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf. Nor was it to offer himself again and again, as the high priest enters the Holy Place year after year with blood that is not his own; for then he would have had to suffer again and again since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the age to remove sin by the sacrifice of himself. And just as it is appointed for mortals to die once, and after that the judgement, so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin, but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.

Mark 1: 14-20

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.' As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake—for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, 'Follow me and I will make you fish for people.' And immediately they left their nets and followed him. As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him.