

Sunday 14 November 2021
Holy Trinity – Holy Communion (8.00am)
St. Margaret's - Holy Communion (09.30)
Remembrance Sunday

Job 19:23-27a
Hebrews 10:11-25
Mark 13:1-8

Remembrance

I suppose that you might wonder why our reading from Job could be suitable for Remembrance Sunday.

It is one of those books in the Bible that has always inspired strong feelings and that's hardly surprising I suppose when you think about its themes of suffering and justice.

It's not an easy book because it asks difficult questions. If God our creator is so utterly loving, why is there suffering and evil in our world?

But Job is not an answer to this problem.

What Job tries to do is to suggest that there are ways of living that are entirely consistent with our creation by, and in the image of, a God who is all loving.

If we're going to understand the book of Job it's vital to realise that Job is completely innocent.

Job's suffering is entirely undeserved and the whole plot of the book depends on us knowing this fact.

From the outset Satan implies that the whole purpose of God's creation is undermined from the very beginning. God made humans to be free and independent so that they could exercise free will in everything.

But, and this is key here, most importantly free to decide whether to enter into a relationship with God.

Of course, Satan claims that people only love God because of what he can do for them.

Their love, according to Satan, is no more free and unconditional than it would have been if God had created robots instead of humans.

Everything that follows in the book is a systematic testing of that idea.

Do we indeed love God just for the security and favours he can give us?

Or, do we love him the way he intended; the way Father, Son and Holy Spirit love one another?

As Job suffers, his family and friends turn away from him because they think he has been cursed by God. They take it for granted that the whole point of worshipping God is that he will then protect you. Therefore, it must follow that if you're not protected, then that means that you must have done something wrong and God has withdrawn his care for you.

But Job steadfastly rejects that idea.

In the passage that we read today, Job has clearly reached the end of his tether.

In the verses just before this we hear how all those who should love and support Job have completely abandoned him.

Certainly, Job is angry with God.

He wants a written record of all that he's been through so that he can present it to God and demand a satisfactory answer.

And there's another key thing to notice here and that is that God is still everything to Job.

In all his pain, distress and fury it never occurs to Job to stop believing in God.

So, what is it that Job wants from God?

Does he want justice?

Does he want health?

Does he want his wealth and his family and his position back?

Well, maybe he does.

But more than anything else, he wants to stand in the presence of the living God and know that he is loved and that their relationship is real.

Above everything else Job needs to know that his Redeemer lives.

This passage demonstrates with utter clarity that Satan has lost.

Job doesn't just believe in God in the good times.

In his despair it is only God that Job looks to.

He longs to know that God is on his side as, indeed, he was.

It's when I got to this point in my thinking about Job that I began to realise why this is such an appropriate reading for Remembrance Sunday.

Job needed to remember what it was he knew before his trials started and came to understand again afterwards.

And that is that every human life is a unique and irreplaceable gift, and therefore of infinite value.

And, if we, like Job, can understand that our life is a gift from a giver; that's to say, a gift from a Creator God who loves us above all things, this should make all the difference in the world to how we value sacrifices made for us by others.

So, it's in that context that we are here today to remember.

To remember those who surrendered that life on our behalf and to remember as well those who are left behind.

Remembrance is important.

Remembrance was clearly important to Jesus.

In our celebration of Holy Communion which we will come to shortly, we are confronted with Christ's command, which he delivered the night before his death on the cross, "Do this in remembrance of me" Jesus said.

Remembrance is part of our value system.

In my youth, many years ago when I was indeed very young, I was a chorister in my local church. I can clearly remember one of the very first Acts of Remembrance that I attended.

At the end of our morning service the crucifer led the clergy out to the war memorial which was about a hundred yards from the church. The clergy were followed by the choir, still robed, and they were followed by the British Legion with their standards, and then the Boy Scouts, the Girl Guides, the Boys Brigade and the local Combined Cadet Force, all finally followed by the congregation. It was quite a sight - a pretty impressive gathering.

The vicar prayed, the names from the war memorial were read out and wreaths were laid. Then, as the Last Post was sounded by the bugler, all the flags were lowered and the two minute silence began. To a by now really quite cold eight year old chorister, two minutes seemed like an eternity, and so it probably was for some others as well. As the silence deepened, it was pierced by a woman's sobs and her crying filled the rest of the two minutes. Her husband was one of those who'd been killed in action right at the very end of the war which had finished just thirteen years earlier.

It struck me powerfully then, and whilst I didn't really understand it at the time, I have never forgotten it. And that is that the Act of Remembrance isn't just about those who were on the front line.

It's also about traumatised soldiers who somehow survived,
it's about inconsolable parents,
young widows and widowers,
brothers and sisters,
all sad for a lifetime.

There are no words for the scale of this suffering, then or now.
All we have is remembrance.

But the other element of this silence, which isn't so obvious, is that it's shared.

The two minutes silence encompasses families and friends as well as unknown strangers at war memorials. And, of course, sometimes the very people whose decisions send our servicemen and women into battle in the first place. We should also include them in our envelope of support for those touched by war. And so, intrinsic to remembrance of the past, is that it should alter our present.

Although, our current experience of world events is that we have some way to go before that can be said with any confidence.

Even while we must re-commit ourselves to live lives of peace-making, today just for a while, we together say nothing, because for those who suffer the heart-stopping reality of the catastrophe of war, sometimes, there really is nothing to say.

It's true that they, the dead, grow not old; but it's the testimony of the bereaved that neither does their love grow cold. Something, perhaps, we should remember throughout the year and not just on a cold Sunday morning in November.

Amen.