

Sermon for Remembrance Sunday, 8 November 2020

By the Rev. Jackie Bullen

MEMORIES have a habit of ambushing us when we least expect it, the sound of a song that reminds us of our first love, the smell of a favourite food that reminds us of home, the object which we associate with a particular time of our life.

These things and many more can trigger memories so strong we are instantly transported back in time as emotions and images come flooding back.

Some memories we treasure and we find ways to preserve them.

Even if you aren't a hoarder, it is a rare person who doesn't keep any mementos, photos, diaries, letters, emails, videos, or objects as reminders of those key events and people who are important to us. Those who are dear to us.

Memories – what are they good for? Absolutely nothing, I think my some people might say. For some who have witnessed atrocities they would rather forget there is a real sense of wishing and hoping. Hoping that memories would fade or even fail so that they don't have to be faced.

Maybe you have a relative or a friend who has served in conflict situations yet chooses not to speak of it and those who love them have learned not to ask. Because there are some memories of course most people would rather forget, or we find that there are no words to express the horror of what has been seen and done and suffered, no words at all.

On the other hand, you may know someone like my uncle Joe, who was always ready and willing to tell his story. He regularly entertained us by telling stories of flying aircraft whilst smoking a packet of fags. He would chain smoke, because he knew that way when he needed to start his descent and he would look for the runway on a certain heading and it never failed apparently.

And of his times playing cards for money and winning enough to buy a row of houses which of course he later lost in another game and then he would laugh loudly and say that he had a good time with his mates and that no-one bore a grudge.

It took me a long time to realize that some of those events he spoke of might have been less glamorous than he made them sound!

For him, I'm now quite sure that it was his way of coping with what he had seen and heard and lived through.

And who am I to say which one of these two types of people was right or wrong? Keeping quiet or speaking out. It is a very personal choice.

For some Remembrance Sunday will always be personal, a time to recall the loss of people we love, when we are reminded of the scars visible or invisible that we carry around as a result of conflict, when we are confronted with actions that still bring with them a sense of guilt and shame or, equally, we are inspired by the dogged determination, loyalty and amazing courage demonstrated by ordinary human beings in the face of adversity and yes, evil.

But I would suggest that it would be a mistake to think that Remembrance Sunday is purely personal, just for those personally affected by loss or memories of war. Rather, it is a time for everyone to be invited to remember. An essential reminder that we live in community with one another and that the decisions we make as a nation, or as part of a global network of nations, ripple out to affect us all and that in a democracy we bear corporate responsibility for those actions.

Memories, what are they good for, we ask. Well remembering plays a vital role in defining our identity, because through our memories we try to make sense of the world around us, we learn from our experience, or at least sometimes we do.

There is a certain hopefulness in choosing to remember, an opportunity to look forward to what we might do differently next time.

It is said that a fool learns from his own experience, a wise person from the experience of others...

Here today, can we imagine a Remembrance Sunday where no-one in the congregation had any experience of war? Where there was no-one who knew anyone who had died or been hurt or suffered post-traumatic stress disorder, or watched a marriage disintegrate as a result of conflicts past or present? It would be lovely, wonderful, a blessing.

Strangely, it is easier to encourage people to remember while we are still, as a nation, involved with conflicts, when we are regularly confronted with the loss or injury of men and women in the armed forces, while the images of global conflicts are broadcast into our home each week.

Although the memories may be more painful than we can sometimes bear, the importance of remembering is at least clear at such times.

But will we choose to continue to remember during times of peace, I wonder?

Every week Christians meet to drink wine and eat bread in memory of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour. To remember that God once came to earth in human form, to live and

love, laugh and cry and die among us. To demonstrate his love for us, to overcome evil and death. We eat bread and drink wine, remembering Jesus' promise to return.

We remember that he chose willingly to go to the cross, because it was the only way to reconcile us to God.

The peace we can share with one another each Sunday, the peace of Christ which passes all understanding, is not a cheap peace that cost nothing, but cost everything.

I would suggest that there is no such thing as cheap peace, easy peace, because there is always a cost to achieving peace. Negotiation costs, justice costs. And we have to ask ourselves whether we are willing to bear that cost and what it means to ask others to bear it too.

On Remembrance Sunday we remember service men and women, peace-keepers and civilians, in fact all those who have paid, as well as those who continue to pay, that cost on our behalf.

We remember that behind every news story, every statistic, is a human being, a much loved child of God.

And we promise faithfully not to forget today.

We will remember them.

Amen.