

REMEMBRANCE SUNDAY — 8TH NOVEMBER 2020

INTRODUCTION:

Remembrance Sunday: It's about remembering.
It's about thanksgiving.
It should also be about forgiveness and reconciliation.

CALL TO WORSHIP Psalm 46:10'

"Be still, and know that I am God;
I will be exalted among the nations,
I will be exalted in the earth."

1ST HYMN 403 StF God is love.

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| 1 | God is love; his the care,
Tending each, everywhere.
God is love — all is there!
Jesus came to show him,
That we all might know him: | Finding him in others,
Sisters all, and brothers. |
| <i>Refrain</i> | Sing aloud, loud, loud!
Sing aloud, loud, loud!
God is Good!
God is truth!
God is beauty! Praise Him! | 3 Jesus came, lived and died
For our sake, crucified,
Rose again, glorified;
He was born to save us
By the truth he gave us. |
| 2 | None can see God above;
Neighbours here we can love;
Thus may we Godward move, | 4 To our Lord praise we sing -
Light and life, friend and king,
Coming down love to bring,
Pattern for our duty,
Showing God in beauty. |

PRAYER

O God, give us a vision of your glory, that we may worship you in spirit and in truth, and offer the praise of glad and thankful hearts; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Loving God,

We are reminded today of how easy it is to speak peace,
and how difficult it is to pursue it;
how straightforward it sounds to talk of breaking down barriers,
and how demanding it actually is to live as peacemakers.
Yet we are reminded also that this is what you want from us —
to live in such a way that we heal wounds rather than create them,
that we unite rather than divide,
that we reconcile rather than separate.

Loving God,

We confess the things within us which make for conflict —
pride, greed, envy, intolerance,
our nursing of petty grievances,
our unwillingness to forgive,
our preoccupation with self and our lack of time for others —
so much that we are as guilty of as any other.
Lord, forgive us.

Loving God,

Rescue us from all that keeps us apart,
and put a new spirit within us —
a spirit of love and openness,
acceptance and understanding,

healing and reconciliation.

May the peace we pray for begin here and now in our hearts,
and so may we be instruments of your peace,
bringing healing to our broken world,
and harmony between nations.

Lord, hear our prayer.

In the name of Christ. **Amen.**

THE LORD'S PRAYER

2ND HYMN 132 StF O God our help in ages past.

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| 1 O God, our help in ages past,
Our hope for years to come,
Our shelter from the stormy blast,
And our eternal home: | 44 A thousand ages in thy sight
Are like an evening gone,
Short as the watch that ends the
night
Before the rising sun. | 66 Time, like an ever-rolling stream,
Bears all its sons away;
They fly forgotten, as a dream
Dies at the opening day. |
| 2 Under the shadow of thy throne
Thy saints have dwelt secure;
Sufficient is thine arm alone,
And our defence is sure. | 55 The busy tribes of flesh and blood,
With all their cares and fears,
Are carried downward by the flood,
And lost in following years. | 7 O God, our help in ages past,
Our hope for years to come,
Be thou our guard while life shall
last,
And our eternal home. |
| 3 Before the hills in order stood
Or earth received her frame,
From everlasting thou art God,
To endless years the same | | |

THE TRADITIONAL ACT OF REMEMBRANCE SAID IN CHURCHES:

Let us remember before God, and commend to his sure keeping:

those who have died for their country in war
those whom we knew, and whose memory we treasure;
and all who have lived and died in the service of humankind.

They shall not grow old as we that are left grow old:

Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.

At the going down of the sun and in the morning

We shall remember them.

We shall remember them.

2 MINUTES SILENCE

When you go home tell them of us and say —

For your tomorrow we gave our today

PRAYER

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; though Christ our Lord.

Amen.

READINGS

Matthew 18:21-35

The parable of the unmerciful servant.

Romans 8:31-35, 37-39.

More than conquerors.

SERMON

Remembrance Sunday:

It's about remembering.

It's about thanksgiving.

It should also be about forgiveness and reconciliation.

Only those well over 100 may possibly have some childhood memory of the First World War. More remember the Second World War.

From time to time TV series remind us of the atrocities of the Nazi regime.

The warning from history can be powerful.

Over the years horrifying pictures from Ireland, Rwanda, Kosova, the Middle East, the Falklands, & Afghanistan have been beamed into our living room.

How can those people personally affected possibly find forgiveness in their hearts.

In human terms, they can't.

Yet, all things are possible through the love of Christ within us.

But, it's not only in wartime situations that people are victims of brutality, as daily news reminds us.

e.g. Where a loved one is murdered, a child abducted, a daughter raped.

FORGIVENESS. It is fundamental to Christianity and so important in today's society.

Jesus died on the cross to forgive us our sins. By God's grace we are forgiven. That is good news and in that lies our joy and our hope.

But we are also required to forgive others.

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus said: *"Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy."*

In James 2:13 we read: *... judgement without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful.*

This comes out in the Lord's Prayer: *Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.*

The words which follow in Matthew 6:14-15 are quite a facer.

"For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins."

If we don't forgive others, then the Lord won't forgive us.

This is hard teaching; there is no getting away from that.

But the point is not the time sequence.

It is rather the insincerity of a prayer for forgiveness from an unforgiving disciple.

If we won't forgive we can't expect forgiveness.

On one occasion Peter asked Jesus how many times we should forgive someone. (Matthew 18:21-35)

The rabbis taught that one should forgive 3 times.

So Peter went considerably further in suggesting 7 times.

But Jesus said 70 times 7 (or 77 times depending on the translation).

He blew away their tiny concepts and put forgiveness into an entirely different league.

No one with any kind of heart for, or understanding of, forgiveness could find it in them to keep records that long. It means that we must go on forgiving.

St Paul confirms this in 1 Corinthians 13:5 where he states that love *"keeps no record of wrongs"*.

It is amazing grace that came to us and amazing grace that we are expected to pass on.

In this parable which Jesus went on to give, the unmerciful servant owed the equivalent of millions of pounds.

The talent was the highest unit of currency and 10 thousand the highest Greek numeral.

Let's make the contrast another way.

The amount the servant was forgiven was more than the province's income.

The amount the servant owed him was a young teenager's weekly pocket money.

The ridiculous contrast in the amounts emphasises the unreasonableness of the forgiven servant's attitude.

Having been forgiven this massive debt which is completely beyond his ability to pay, he finds a fellow servant who owes him a few pounds, but throws him into prison, where with his earning power lost, he has no chance of repaying.

The master is angry and says he should have shown mercy as the master had been merciful to him. ∴ He was thrown into prison and tortured.

Jesus ends by saying: *"This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart."* (Matthew 18:35)

I'm sure we have all heard people say, "I can never forgive him for that."
Such an attitude engenders bitterness and hatred and is destructive to the person with those feelings.
But **when we forgive someone else we are in fact freed ourselves.**

There are several points to remember about FORGIVENESS of others.

- 1 We must ask ourselves the difficult question:
Is "I can't forgive" really a cover for "I won't forgive"?
- 2 We are commanded by Jesus to forgive & we have Jesus' example.
Forgiveness is primarily an act of will not of feelings.
We are so often ruled by our feelings.
This can be very dangerous,
as our feelings are unreliable and can change as quickly as the wind.
If we pray in faith and obedience that we do forgive someone the way they have wronged us,
I can testify that one's feelings and attitude will be transformed.
But the feelings follow and don't come first.
If we wait for the feelings before we forgive someone, we might wait for ever.
During that time feelings of anger, resentment, bitterness and revenge fester.
That increases our own misery.
- 3 When we are in the presence of the Lord and come to the foot of the cross,
we see ourselves as we really are.
Then when we realise how great is Jesus' love for us,
what He did for us in dying,
how He has forgiven us
and we only have to claim that forgiveness in penitence,
then we know that there is no way that we can refuse to forgive those who've wronged us.
- 4 Forgiveness does not depend on the other person.
By forgiving them, we release them into the possibility of a restored relationship.
And we are ourselves freed.
When Jesus died on the cross, it was while we were yet sinners.
He died once only, and thereby released God's power to save sinners.
Our relationship with God is restored when we accept God's gift of forgiveness.
The other person's relationship with us is restored when they are penitent and accept the forgiveness offered.
- 5 Forgiveness is not cheap.
Forgiveness is not easy.

I am aware that many people who have undergone such appalling experiences would find the suggestion of forgiveness obscene and quite impossible.
In human terms that would be so.

e.g. I remember in 1993? my feelings when I heard on the news yet another horrific story from W Belfast.
Michael Edwards, a father of 6, was shot several times as he slept beside his wife at their home.
His children ran into the bedroom as he lay dying and pleaded, "Don't die daddy."
I tried to put myself in the shoes of that wife.
In such circumstances, could I forgive those murderers?
In human terms, in my own strength, I could not forgive.
But with God, nothing is impossible.
In the power of the Holy Spirit within us, even such seemingly impossible forgiveness is possible.

e.g. I'm sure many remember Gordon Wilson whose daughter was killed in Enniskillen on Remembrance Sunday in the 1980s by an IRA bomb.
He went on TV to forgive publicly the bombers and ask that there be no reprisals.
His faith and obedience enabled him to forgive, and he went on to work for reconciliation.

e.g. In the news in January 2003 — Stephen Oake, the police officer who was shot dead.
A committed Christian. Member of Poynton Baptist Church. Led prayers. In the music group.

The media published that about him, I'm glad to say.

On the Sunday morning I heard on Hedley Feast's Sunday Breakfast (Berkshire Radio) what his father, Robin Oake said a few days earlier:

This morning I got up and spent time with the Lord reading the Bible and praying.

I read Psalm 46. *God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. ... Be still, and know that I am God.* (v.1,10) I don't want any recrimination in my heart. I want him (the murderer) to know my forgiveness. I want him to get right with God. I'm praying for him and will continue to do so.

In his death, Stephen and his father were a great witness for Christ.

Who knows what seeds were sown.

Who knows if anyone came to Christ because of their witness.

Forgiveness frees us.

The relationship is fully restored when the other person is repentant.

Applies to us and God.

Applies to 2 people. We can do our part even if the other person won't meet us half-way.

But we can know inner peace even if it is still tinged with sadness.

How can we be commanded to love?

We can be commanded to do this or not to do that, but how can God command us to love?

God who asks us to love also provides us with the power to do what He commands.

We do not have to love — we have to allow love to love us into loving.

In other words, the command to love does not mean that we have to reach down within ourselves to create feelings of love for God.

But rather we should focus on how much He loves us and let His love, love us into loving.

That love will enable us to forgive.

But let us come back to the heart of the matter.

Jesus on the cross said *"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."* Lk 23:34)

Unconditional forgiveness in the face of the ultimate injustice.

And by His very death on the cross Jesus gave up everything for our forgiveness.

When we comprehend the magnitude of God's grace to us through Jesus,

then surely we can only stand speechless in His presence & freely release all those who have sinned against us.

How can we turn our backs on such love? How can we refuse to forgive others?

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. (Romans 8:37)

Remembrance must be bound up with repentance and forgiveness.

In obedience and faith, and in the power of the Holy Spirit, we can forgive. Amen.

3RD HYMN 696 StF For the healing of the nations.

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|---|--|
| 1 For the healing of the nations,
Lord, we pray with one accord;
For a just and equal sharing
Of the things that earth affords.
To a life of love in action
Help us rise and pledge our word. | 3 All that kills abundant living,
Let it from the earth be banned;
Pride of status, race, or schooling,
Dogmas that obscure your plan.
In our common quest for justice
May we hallow life's brief span. |
| 2 Lead us, Father, into freedom;
From despair your world release,
That, redeemed from war and hatred,
All may come and go in peace.
Show us how through care and goodness
Fear will die and hope increase. | 4 You, Creator-God, have written
Your great name on humankind;
For our growing in your likeness
Bring the life of Christ to mind;
That by our response and service
Earth its destiny may find. |

INTERCESSIONS

Lord of all,
hear us now as we pray for the victims of war
and for peace in our world.

We pray for those across the world who bear the scars of conflict —
the injured, maimed and mentally distressed,
those who have lost their limbs, their reason or their loved ones
through the horrors of war.

We pray for those left homeless or as refugees,
those who have lost their livelihoods and security,
and those who still live in daily fear for their lives.

We pray for those in the armed forces,
charged with keeping the peace in countries across the world —
their work involving months away from family and friends,
and often danger to themselves.

We pray for world leaders and rulers,
politicians and diplomats —
those whose decisions and negotiations
affect the lives of so many,
and in whose hands peace ultimately lies.

Lord of all,
Give wisdom to all who work for peace,
So that a more secure future may be ensured for all.
Give courage to those who strive for justice, so that the causes of conflict may be overcome.
Give strength to those who seek to break down barriers,
That divisions within society may be ended.
Grant that wherever there is war, or the threat of war,
A way of reconciliation may be found,
And harmony established between people and nations.
Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer. Amen.

4th HYMN 693 Stf Beauty for Brokenness

1

Beauty for brokenness,
hope for despair,
Lord, in your suffering world
this is our prayer.
Bread for the children,
justice, joy, peace,
sunrise to sunset,
your kingdom increase!

2

Shelter for fragile lives,
cures for their ills,
work for all people,
trade for their skills;
land for the dispossessed,
rights for the weak,
voices to plead the cause
of those who can't speak.

*God of the poor,
friend of the weak,
give us compassion we pray:
melt our cold hearts,
let tears fall like rain;
come, change our love
from a spark to a flame.*

3

Refuge from cruel wars,
havens from fear,
cities for sanctuary,
freedoms to share.
Peace to the killing-fields,
scorched earth to green,
Christ for the bitterness,
his cross for the pain.

4

Rest for the ravaged earth,
oceans and streams
plundered and poisoned —
our future, our dreams.
Lord, end our madness,
carelessness, greed;
make us content with
the things that we need.

Refrain

5

Lighten our darkness,
breathe on this flame
until your justice burns
brightly again;
until the nations
learn of your ways,
seek your salvation
and bring you their praise.

Refrain

Graham Kendrick (b. 1950)

BLESSING

God grant to the living, grace; to the departed, rest; to the Church, and the world, peace and concord; and to us and all his servants, life everlasting; and the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be upon you and remain with you always. **Amen.**