

SERMON NOTES Sunday 12th November 2023

sunnysidechurch

Theme: **Remembrance**

Passages: **Micah 4.1-5, John 15.9-17**

Some of the main themes from the sermon

Poppies

It is impossible to look at a poppy or a picture of poppies in Flanders fields and not feel an aching sorrow for so many lives cut short and so many families devastated by bereavement; for so many people maimed, so many lives torn apart. Today I want us to think about how we, as God's people, process those complex feelings that the poppies prompt and about where we can find meaning and hope in the seemingly senseless suffering of war.

Vision and practicality

The vision of God's prophet, Micah, in our Old Testament reading is of a world in which there is justice and peace, with no threat of violence. (v3). As a result of this and alongside it, there is no poverty and people can live without fear (v4). Micah seems to accept that there will be disputes between nations (v3) and that not all nations will follow God (v5). Even so Micah's vision is that God's justice will prevail (v2) as all nations accept the wisdom of God's ways.

Where is God in this mess?

How do we respond to that vision in the light of the wars that are currently consuming our world; wars which threaten to escalate and consume us. Is it anything more than just an idle dream? A make-believe world unrelated to this one? Many people would think that. Others would say (as John Lennon did) that the behaviour of religious believers is one of the main causes of wars.

New for old

I think both of those reactions fail to get to the heart of the matter. Though Micah's vision may not tell the whole story, it certainly points to a real hope. The desire for a world in which everyone can 'sit under their own vine', in peace without fear is widely shared. The difficulty is how to get to this state of affairs. Our New Testament reading has something important to say about this. Jesus was speaking to his closest followers not long before his execution at the hands of corrupt religious authorities and a vicious and heartless state.

The Jesus effect

Jesus' death was an example that some have been called to follow over the years but it was also unique; the crucial initiative in bringing the history of the

world to a place where all people can flourish. Jesus, the Messiah, God's own son is speaking with his closest followers. He knows his act of self-sacrificial love in 'laying down his life for his friends' (v13) will overthrow the forces of evil.' His resurrection, central to our faith as Christians, affirms that good is stronger than evil, love more powerful than hatred.

The war is won but the skirmishes continue

Jesus overcame evil once and for all but the 20 centuries since Jesus' resurrection have been characterised by evil in many forms: war, famine, cruelty. We can't shy away from this or from our own complicity in some of the evil that takes place in our own day.

Where does this leave us on Remembrance Day 2023

It leaves me with a complex set of mental images:

The **lament** is still there, for all that so many have lost and an **aching sadness** for those who suffer in today's conflicts. **Gratitude** is there for the bravery and steadfastness shown by people I will never know. There is **anger** too that people have been placed in danger by the deliberate decisions of others and an **acceptance** that those in positions of leadership have to make agonisingly difficult life and death decisions, often with limited information. There is **humility** because I simply don't know whether I would have the courage or the love to give my life for my friends. There is also **hope** that in all the toing and froing of human affairs, God is working his purpose out, so that there will be a time as God has promised, when 'he will wipe every tear from their eyes....' (Rev 21:4). And finally, there is **determination** to follow my calling as Jesus' follower and friend to do my part and pray and work that God's Kingdom will come.

Some questions for thought and discussion this week:

1. *Look at the words in bold in the paragraph above. In terms of your own response to Remembrance Day, would you add any others? Would you omit any? Do any of them seem particularly important at this time?*
2. *How can we make our voice heard in relation to the current conflicts in the world? Should we engage in activism?*
3. *What does it mean to love each other as Jesus loved us (John 15.12)?*
4. *What does it mean to love our enemies (Matt 5.44)? Is this possible? Has anyone ever truly loved their enemies?*