

Immanuel, 14th November 2021
Isaiah 25: 1-10 Revelation 21; 1-5

Remembrance Sunday

We need things to be different

Lord Christ, we are strangers and pilgrims on the earth, disconcerted by the world's violence and its sorrow, distracted by our inward doubts and fears. Wherever we are on this day's journey, breathe on us your gentle Spirit, that we may be oases of quietness and refreshment, bringing to your uneasy world reconciliation and peace. Amen

The two readings for this morning, in a way summarise the human reality – conflict, tension, destruction on one hand, while on the other, the hope that sooner rather than later, things will be different from what today seems “normal”, and peace will not be a dream, but a construction we are all involved in.

When we hear the words in Revelation: *Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth...and the sea was no more*, these words become an affirmation of hope. When in Isaiah we read *Then the Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces*, this is an expression of change.

We need things to be different. We cannot get used to pain, fear, destruction, hatred, persecution, discrimination being a “natural” way of life, as if they defined normality. Who wants that type of normality? I do not! Do you?

Each year, Remembrance Sunday is a time when we need to re-affirm the vision God has for life, even when that often seems complicated. But we do this amid the reality of destruction, of hatred, of death, of brokenness... where these realities seem not to add up, but to multiply. Where we thought we had seen the back of some, we discover to our horror, that pain has re-emerged. It is the duty of faith to resist evil, and not accept what is wrong as right.

It is true there are lots of violent scenes in the Old Testament, scenes that are abhorrent to us today, as they should be. And no matter how much we try, history cannot be treated as if it never happened. We must look history in the face, and so take away its power to become life depriving, as so often is the case. *“Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it”* (a famous quote by George Santayana). The past has lots of moments that we need to reject because they are wrong.

So let us truly remember. Isaiah makes an affirmation of faith: *O Lord, you are my God, I exalt you*. That should always be our starting point. God has dismantled the structures of the powers of the time: *the fortified city a ruin; the palace of aliens is a city no more* and God has become a refuge to the poor and needy, a shelter. Once again, we read in the Bible about God as being different from the powers of then and of now. God is always on the side of those who have nobody who cares for them or to protect them. And too often in history the protectors can become the ruthless, but not God...

So where are we in this reality? How do our actions demonstrate where we stand? It may seem a romantic vision denied by realism that war, destruction, hatred, cannot be humanity's way forward. Increasingly it is the case and has been so for too long. So here we see how the prophet and the visionary of Revelation challenge us with the vision of the Kingdom – God

will wipe tears for all faces, the hungry will be fed, and death will be swallowed up for ever. Is this the impossible dream? It might be, but it is certainly a dream I want to dream, a dream I would hope we would all want to dream.

A dream of construction not destruction. Where the city of Peace -Jersu shalom, will come down to where we are, so where we are will not have been destroyed. The final words of the reading from Revelation are what God is calling us to be a part of: 'See, I am making all things new.' That newness must take shape, human shape not in sometime in the future, but we must begin today to work for this: the famine in Afghanistan, Ethiopia, the droughts, the destruction, the struggles and the exploitation suffered by the aboriginal peoples, the fear, children and so many of them with no access to education, the lack of Covid vaccines for so many countries of the world, drinking water. In one word – Basic Human Rights for all people. If we believe in God, the word of God must become the motor of our actions, of our thoughts, of our prayers.

Today is a day marked by Remembrance, but if the remembering only looks to the past is it doomed. If remembering is only remembering some while ignoring others we will never mature, grow, love, because what we need is a remembering that moves us forward as agents of change, of peace, of justice, of reconciliation - where things must be different, then we will be truly living our faith. So yes, we pray, yes, we remember, and yes – we walk to the new heavens and the new earth, the reality of Peace for all, everywhere. Amen.