

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted”

A sermon prepared by Revd Viv Bridges for Remembrance Sunday 8 November 2020

Refs: 1 Thessalonians 4.13-18; Matthew 5.1-12

A bit later today the names of local men and women who died in the First and Second World Wars and Korea will be read out at our War Memorial and the nation will remember men and women who have died in other conflicts – Aden, The Falklands, Iraq, Afghanistan. We are constantly reminded of the many areas of war throughout the world - the fight against evil doesn't seem to be anywhere near victory. And the horror of the battle against evil is dreadful.

I cannot conceive what it must have been like living in those dreadful trenches, or 'going over the top' to what was almost certain injury, if not death. But neither can I conceive what it must be like today, setting out on patrol in areas of conflict or setting out as a policeman on patrol in this country - there have been a number of policemen killed recently as they continue to try to protect us. Neither can I conceive what it must be like waiting at home, wondering day after day if a loved one will return in one piece. Just over 100 years ago, many families were separated for years at a time, often with no communication at all. Today, communications are much better, and we hear very quickly if someone is injured or killed. The whole nation mourns if a single life is lost in the pursuit of peace – on the battlefield, or on our local streets. 100 years ago the dead and injured were shipped home in their thousands, there was no time for the nation to mourn every individual death. But the pain and the agony were just the same for each and every individual's family and friends.

For many men and women, throughout the ages, it has felt as if God – if he existed at all – was very far away from the battlefield, and far away from homes in mourning. But for many others it was their belief that God was with them that enabled them to get through their particular horror. For them, God had demonstrated his involvement in the on-going fight against evil by sending his own Son into that fight.

Through Jesus, God knows the horror and fear of setting out on a path that will inevitably lead to suffering, and probably to death – Jesus 'set his face' towards Jerusalem, and he carried his own cross to his place of execution. And through Jesus, God knows what it is like to see a loved one suffer – to stand, as Mary did, by the cross and watch a son die in terrible pain. But for Jesus, this was the only way to win the battle against evil. He could have escaped, called on that army of angels, or walked away. But this would have been a victory for the evil powers of his day. So he refused to 'side' with its forces, even though it meant his own physical death. But because he was prepared to make the ultimate sacrifice, he was raised to life again.

Jesus said that the greatest expression of 'love' is to give up your life for your friends. This doesn't always mean 'dying' for them, but it does mean making sacrifices for them. Some people do this by working tirelessly to try to bring about peace and justice for the poor and the oppressed, even though this can bring about ridicule and frustration, even injury or death. Some people do it by tirelessly 'being a good neighbour', always ready to put other people first. We've recognised this so much in the past months as so many people have devoted their lives to the battle against the coronavirus. Some people still risk their lives on the battlefield, or in police forces.

Jesus' victory over evil, his resurrection achieved through a path of suffering and death, assures us that he will be with everyone who offers up their life in order to try to keep justice and peace alive in the world and that he stands with those who watch and wait, and with those whose waiting ends in pain and grief. And in our Gospel Jesus says words that can be of great comfort, *“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”* For people who have lost loved ones, or seen their lives changed for ever, these words may seem meaningless. But it is the experience of so many people that eventually the things Jesus promises

come to pass. And our reading from the letter to the Thessalonians assures us that all those who pay the ultimate price fighting for Good will be with Christ, in glory and at rest.

We give much thanks for those who, with Christ, offer their lives in the name of love and for those who lost their earthly lives for their friends.

Amen