

St Marc, Grenoble
Sunday 13th November 2022 - Remembrance Sunday
Malachi 4: 1 - 2a
Luke 21: 5 - 19

Remembrance - End or Beginning?

Good Morning, again - **Let's Pray:**

Today is Remembrance Sunday: when we give thanks and honour the men and women who fought and died for their countries, in many wars; and nations honour and remember those who gave their lives, fighting against oppression and for justice.

Remembrance Sunday is often regarded simply as a time for looking back, – giving thanks for sacrifices made and for those who gave their lives for our freedom. But, if we leave it there, their sacrifice will have been in vain.

It should also be a time to look forward and consider the ways we can build on the foundations of peace, freedom and justice, which they sacrificed their lives to create.

The intention of Remembrance Events - in Europe at least, was to remind future generations of the horror and futility of war, and to encourage nations to work together, rather than against each other.

Some years ago, I was invited to join Remembrance Day commemoration, at the Menin Gate in Ypres in Northern France; the scene of horrendous battles and literally millions of deaths of soldiers from many nations, in what we call The First World War.

I went with the Mayor of our town in Kent, which is twinned with Ypres, to lay a Wreath. It was one of the most moving occasions in my life. The Menin Gate, was built as a memorial for around three hundred thousand young men killed in battles in that area; over 90,000 of whose bodies have never been identified. As we laid our wreaths, poppies rained down from the roof for many minutes - each poppy representing one life lost in nearby battles.

My Grandad was there - he was a London Bus Driver and was sent to take troops, mainly young men with no real experience of life, to the front lines. For many of them it was the beginning of the journey from life to death - millions never went home. My Grandad survived, but he was gassed, which affected his health to the end of his life.

How desperately shameful, in our 21st C culture, that pride, greed and lust for money and power have usurped the ideals of peaceful living, in countries around the world.

As Christians we must continue to pray for world peace and justice to prevail. And hold firm to the words of Psalm 46: 7, 9 - 10:

The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge ... He makes wars cease

to the end of the earth; he breaks the bow, and shatters the spear, (and, I would suggest, the rifle and the machine gun) he burns the chariots with fire.
'Be still and know that I am God.'

Today's Gospel reading has a similar edge.

People crowding around Jesus were admiring the beauty and grandeur of the temple; but He threw a stone into their pond of contentment! "Don't get comfortable with this edifice. A time is coming when not a single stone here will be left in place."

That brought them up with a jolt – it was a challenge to them and to their religion, which is almost impossible for us to understand. The temple was one of the main foundations of their faith; a place of beauty, history, security and continuity; where they could commune with God. It had been built, decorated and adorned by the skill and love of Jewish people for around a thousand years. It was the centre of their national religious life and culture, and their relationship with God; now Jesus was prophesying it would be swept away.

Throughout His ministry, Jesus had been challenging everything the Temple stood for. He saw it as a symbol of the perversion of religion, which He constantly opposed. The Temple had come to stand for what was wrong; but its destruction would dramatically impact the Jewish people's relationship with God; and, here was Jesus, prophesying this iconic symbol of their faith, was to be destroyed.

Possibly the nearest we could get to understanding it, would be like suggesting in France the Arc de Triomphe, the Eiffel Tower and Notre Dame Cathedral were all going to be destroyed. Even then, I doubt it would have the same gravity.

Of course, it also prompted the inevitable questions from His disciples: "How, and when? - What signs or warnings will we have when this is going to happen?"

Jesus' response was "Don't worry about it. Don't be concerned with bricks and mortar; and don't take any notice of false prophets – the know-alls, who pretend they can predict the end of the world; they cannot! No one other than God Himself knows when the end of the world is coming."

It's worth reminding ourselves that Jesus' prophecy was absolutely correct; the Temple was, in fact, destroyed in AD 70, when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem.

The 'New Covenant', through redemption in Jesus' Blood replaced the purpose of the Temple; we no longer have to go to one place to meet and worship God. We have the promise 'He is always with us'.

Jesus warned of very difficult times ahead. We've seen some in recent history - It is what Remembrance Sunday is about. Jesus tells us not to be dismayed by it.

He says: "Do not be afraid when you hear of wars and revolutions – and earthquakes

and disasters. These things will happen!" These trials will be real opportunities. Jesus promises, if we stick close to Him, we'll be given the spiritual resources to cope with the difficulties, adversity, hardships, persecutions, betrayals and rejections by friends and colleagues, and even by our own families.

Jesus encourages us not to worry how we will defend ourselves and our faith, through these challenges, but to trust Him. He promises He'll always provide the words and the wisdom we need. The Apostle Paul was a good example of this.

In v.12 & 13 Jesus says that these times of trial will be "Your chance to share the Good News!" What does that mean to us in Grenoble in 2022? It may feel remote.

It means every time our faith is challenged as soft and outdated, or our morals as outmoded, there is an opportunity to share our faith. We either turn tail and conform, or we stand firm, trust in Jesus and reject the marginalisation of Christian values, the oppression of the poor and the ever increasing injustice towards those who do not conform to the so called 'norms' of our increasingly God-less society.

Every occasion is an opportunity to share the 'Good News', which Jesus offers; and to try and gently reflect the unconditional love He personifies.

We're fortunate – in some ways too fortunate; most of us will never have to give our lives for our belief. Few of us ever experience real persecution for our Christian faith.

That makes it more difficult to define the boundaries; to see where compromise becomes capitulation; and it's not as easy to see God's unwavering faithfulness. Jesus says, the more we share the Gospel, the more we'll be challenged. The irony is the more we're persecuted, the more we're hated for our faith, the more we will experience Jesus' presence with us.

There's a remarkable paradox in vv. 16–18: Jesus says: "You will be handed over [even by families and friends] and some of you will be put to death; everyone will hate you because of me." Then in the very next breath He says: "But not a single hair from your heads will be lost. Stand firm and you will save yourselves."

It's something I often ask myself, and I encourage you to ask yourself the same question: "In the face of real persecution, could I be that strong?"

I believe the answer is, if we dare to reach out in faith and stand up for what we believe, then God will amaze us by His overwhelming presence with us.

Back to Psalm 48 v.10: Be still, and know that I am God! I am exalted among the nations. I am exalted in the earth

So as I close, let's pray and thank our father God for His amazing faithfulness ...

Amen