Remembrance (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18)

10:00am Remembrance Service – 8th November 2026

Mark 1:14-20

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.'

As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake—for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, 'Follow me and I will make you fish for people.' And immediately they left their nets and followed him. As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. According to the Lord's word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep.

For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage one another with these words.

It is customary for us on Remembrance Sunday to recall the great stream of history that lies in our wake. 2026 is not a major anniversary year from the World Wars, but we shall do well to remember what was achieved in the years immediately following 1945. That same year, on VE Day, Field Marshal Montgomery is quoted in his message to the troops saying: ***'we have won the war, now we need to win the peace.'***

In the following year, agreements were reached amongst the Allies that would seek to prevent new wars in the region, as aftershocks of the old. Victory is not quite as tidy as it may sometimes sound. One only needs to consider the aftermath of conflicts over the last 25 years to realise that.

In the years following the Second World War decisions had to be made about how to structure the governments of Germany and Japan, both powerful industrial nations. Those decisions made would stand the test of time in both cases. The lessons from the Treaty of Versailles in 1919 had been learnt. War could not be allowed to break out again. Military forces needed to be maintained at secure levels – as a deterrent, for peacekeeping, and to counter new threats. If we are not in conflict, then we must prepare to be. That is a call we are hearing much more.

To remember, on a national day such as this, is to be deeply thankful. **But all history is a resource for the future – and the future is a matter of concern for us.** Of one thing we can be sure – remembrance will need to carry on for many reasons – it tells us to keep preparing, and to stay ready. The motto of our own Parachute Regiment is *'Ready for Anything'*.

A little research will tell you that today the British Forces are currently deployed in at least sixteen countries, for operations and training. Add to that the constant patrols of the Royal Navy and Royal Air Force in many other places. For years we gathered for Remembrance knowing that British forces were in current conflict - that was Iraq and Afghanistan.

When I first began leading services of remembrance 18 years ago, always with the children and young people gathered before us in their uniforms, from then until now, some of them would have gone on to join the UK military and to deploy in many places. I myself was in scouts and cadets, although my uniform now is somewhat different. I remember well a similar motto from the Scouts. **I'm sure you know it – 'be prepared.' It sounds very similar to the Parachute Regiment!**

To remember again the anniversaries of the World Wars is only part of the picture, because in fact we have never stopped training, preparing, fighting or defending. **Our nation can recall that today is all about the sacrifice and commitments of the past. It certainly is and most respectfully so, but the future is looking ever more worrying too.** Globally, there is now more active conflict than at any time since 1945. We wear our poppies today for *all* of those who were lost, **but it's appropriate that we as a *nation* have a realistic view of the threats around us today.** Remember how history teaches us.

I find it difficult to hold two thoughts in tension. Perhaps I speak for many. On the one hand I would wish to see de-escalation in all military conflict. No more war – I think we would all want that. Yet on the other hand I would like to see a strong and capable military force able to secure peace wherever the need arises. If the UK reduces its armed forces, will others do the same? **To prepare to counter an armed threat is not to be in favour of war.** I say again - remember how history teaches us.

In our first reading today, which was taken from St Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians, he is trying to address a concern in the early church about those who have died in he past. That is quite fitting for us today too.

Christians believe in the idea of a final victory – in its most cosmic scale. Christ will return to set all things right and make all things new. We sometimes call it the *second coming*. But Paul was writing to alleviate the fears of those whose friends and relatives had already died. How will they benefit from Christ's final victory? What do they stand to get out of it? We might ask how those who killed at the beginning of war are able to feel the relief of victory at its end.

Paul's answer to those first Christians is very much a spiritual one: "For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus all those who have fallen asleep in him."

What Paul is saying is that death is not the last place for those who gave their lives. Even today we invoke the memory of those who died in conflict, as an eternal remembrance. **Paul reminds us that those who are lost to us are not lost to God:** "The Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first."

I made the point a short while ago that all history is a resource. **In planning, we remember. The sacrifice of those who have died in conflict is not lost – not lost at all.** Their legacy is vital history – as a warning of what can come again. The experience and the reasons for going into such danger **are not gone** – they can return, they do return. We feel that now.

'We have won the war, now we need to win the peace.' For those who did indeed win it, their great efforts are still alive in the remembrance of what happened and could happen again. **Their voices and actions are not lost.** They prepared to be ready for anything. Today, it seems even more important to remember that - always.

Amen