

Remembrance Sunday 2016

NOT FADING AWAY

A few years ago people thought Remembrance Day would fade away along with the last survivors of the Great War. But now it appears to be as popular as important as ever.

The world wars of the 20th century have taken on a symbolic value, they represent the tragedy and futility of all war. Each new war adds to the significance of this day, and becomes a new layer of meaning.

We remember because it is so easy to forget.
Because many want to forget.

OUR MEMORIAL

Here at St Michael's, our war memorial is very modest – just a plaque on the wall – because for the First World War we were still part of the parish of St Mary's, and so our memorial is also theirs – the churchyard cross in the centre of Barnes.

But the simple plaque records the names of all those who died, who lived in this parish or worshipped here. And during these centenary years of the first world war we hear their names and situations read out to us.

What is most striking to me, are the addresses. We know people who live in these actual houses. On Railway Side and Archway Street, on Cross Street and White Hart Lane. Real places make for real people.

THIS YEAR

What does 2016 add to this year's Remembrance observance?

It adds the continuing strife in Syria and the siege of Aleppo. Of a country tearing itself apart, of people fleeing, of a refugee camp in Calais and a challenge of compassion to us in Europe.

It adds the battle for Mosul in Iraq, of people used as human shields, of the perversion of a religion.

This year also brings something more subtle. Of a shift in mood, and a politics that plays on fear and anger rather than hope and goodness. In our Referendum and in the American election, we see a kind of politics that devalues language and devalues

people. People are described as types or groups rather than individuals. The rules of civilised discourse in public life – of truthfulness, of courtesy, of integrity – are being eroded. We see the normalisation of ideas and language that should not be normal, and have not been normal since the end of the last world war.

SILENCE

Rowan Williams was once asked a difficult question in a radio interview and he said, ‘*Can I think about that for a moment?*’ There followed a 12 second silence. It seemed like an age to those listening. People tapped their radios to see if they were still working. But the answer was all the better for that pause. Stopping, thinking, being silent, sometimes restores us to ourselves and helps us to understand, to see, to respond in a better way.

‘Be still and know that I am God’ says the Psalmist.

Silence is a route to remembering because it allows things deep within us to appear again. Things we would perhaps rather not remember. The busyness of daily life is sometimes a desperate attempt to avoid the silence in which God speaks to us, in which we remember who we are, and who God is.

That is why forgetting is devastating.

We are shaped by our memories; by what and how we remember. A person with amnesia or dementia becomes a different person. Who am I if I have no past to remember?

But to some extent, all of us select our memories to construct our identity. We do this consciously and unconsciously. We remember what we want, and forget what we would rather avoid.

But sometimes we need to remember even the difficult things – the pain and brokenness of ourselves and of others.

Because in remembering we are *re-membered* – put back together again.

Silence and remembering are intimately connected to who we are.

Silence and remembering are integral to our faith, and to who God is.

ANAMENESIS

At the centre of the Church’s life, at the centre of our service today is an act of remembrance:

*On the same night that we was betrayed,
He took bread, gave the blessing, broke it and gave it to his disciples saying
Take, eat, this is my body which is given for you
Do this in remembrance of me.*

The word remembrance in English stands in for the Greek word *anamnesis*. A philosophical term about drawing from the memory something powerful and vivid. It's use in the New Testament however takes us to the Jewish word for remembrance – *zikkaron*. For Jews, to remember the Passover as Jesus did at the Last Supper, was not just a passive act of calling to mind, it was a dynamic and active process in which the past is dragged into the present, set before us and made real once more.

Recently we have been restoring our All Souls Altar and our Memorial Chapel. Though our war memorial is small, what better memorial could there be? For at that Altar, the sacrifices of men and women are united to the eternal sacrifice of Christ who said '*do this in remembrance of me*'.

RE-MEMBERING OURSELVES

In this Eucharist, and in the 2 minute silence we set before ourselves all the things about ourselves and about the world we would rather forget.

The atrocities of the past, the horrors of the present, and the frightening potential of the future – all the things too horrible for words – and we hold them before God who knows it all. Even when we would rather forget, he remembers. His remembering paves the way for our remembering, our rediscovery of who we are.

This day works to restore our sensitivity to the sins of the past and needs of others in the world today. Many people would prefer not to contemplate the recurring failures of human goodness and kindness – but in our remembering we are brought back together as people,
people who belong together.

Father Stephen Stavarou