

## Sermon for Remembrance Sunday

Seventy-five years ago, in the skies above us, not that far from here, the Battle of Britain was being fought, and still today we remember with great gratitude Churchill's famous words: "Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few."

How little they would imagine that 75 years later we would be engaged in yet another world war, this time against an invisible enemy, which means that we are unable to meet publicly in remembrance. But that does not stop us from taking the time in private to remember, to be grateful, to pray in silence for the end to war.

We think of those who thought they were fighting the "war to end all wars" in 1914 to 1918. As a teenager I remember an elderly friend telling me a very poignant story. She had married at the end of that war and was out walking with her baby son in his pram. An old gentleman stooped to lean over and admire the baby and then shocked her with the extraordinarily prophetic words, "he'll be just the right age for the next war!" Sadly, how right he was. And so it goes on.

Since then we have had more wars than in the whole of the rest of the world's history put together, and there is always a war going on somewhere.

Before the First World War, only 20% of civilians were caught up in the fighting. By the end of the Second World War, that number had grown to 50% and it may be that some of you listening will have had experience of the bombing of London and other cities. In recent years, there has been a grim extension to the legal profession, as there is now a branch known colloquially as war lawyers. Their role is to advise military commanders when and whether they have the right to target civilians. So, for example, if ISIS are camped out amongst a civilian population, any military aged man (horribly known as M A M for short) amongst that civilian population can be legitimately targeted. In the Middle East, where I grew up, this includes boys from the age of 12. Therefore the number of civilians killed in war is now 75%.

No wonder families risk everything to flee from such regions, even to the extent of risking their children's lives trying to cross the channel in flimsy, blow-up boats to this free and safe country in which we are so fortunate to live.

And that brings me back again to the gratitude we should feel, particularly for those who gave their lives in the two World Wars. I suppose, because I have lived in Iraq, it makes me wonder all the more what our life would be like in Britain today if Hitler had won. Think about it for a minute.

And then think about our armed forces still involved in peace keeping across troubled areas of the world at this very moment.

There is a fascinating book, "Not quite the World's End" written by the former BBC foreign correspondent John Simpson, who reported from these various war zones. In it he writes that with the birth of his son, "I have at last understood how fragile, how delicate, how endangered life is and how very valuable - this dead teenager, this dismembered woman, this old man groaning in the gutter could be my own child. The most precious thing there is is life itself."

I have a friend who brought me 3 presents when he came home for a week's Rest and Refreshment leave during his time as a soldier in Afghanistan, some years ago. The first was a metal "Combat Cross" (a cross cut into a metal disc) to go with his identity dog tag. Next he shared with me the one given to the American soldiers. The 3<sup>rd</sup> gift is given out to all who want one by their padre and he asked if he could have a spare one for me, his Vicar. It is a little grey-covered copy of the New Testament and Psalms.

He told me how interesting it was that most of the men, who wouldn't dream of reading the Bible in civilian life, proudly showed their friends that they had asked for a copy too.

And in that greatest of all books, of course, we read how evil in this world has been overcome by Jesus laying down his life for us on the cross. Yet still, across the world today, our television news is filled with "wars and rumours of wars." So, we might be asking ourselves, was Jesus' sacrifice in vain? Was their sacrifice in vain who fought in the war to end all wars only to find the Second World War erupting a mere 21 years later? And every war since. Is it all in vain?

No. Absolutely not. C.S. Lewis, the writer of the Narnia books, puts it so well: "The war is won, but there are still mopping up operations to be completed." Evil has been overcome by Jesus' death on the cross. And don't worry if things seem to be getting worse before they get better. The Bible warns us that that will happen too.

So, take courage as you look at the world around you. You yourself can be part of these mopping up operations, spreading the love of God where you live, until the time we are promised when Jesus, the Prince of Peace, comes again, as he most surely will.