

Bennochy church 11th November 2012

The horrors of war are all around us. The closest to home are the stories and images of British soldiers killed in Afghanistan; there is the Arab Spring that has spawned violence most noticeably in Syria. A prison guard is killed by dissidents in Northern Ireland and the hidden wars around the world that do not get the oxygen of media attention.

For each statistic of war there is an individual, family, close friends, people who mourn the loss of a loved one or help the maimed and injured, both physically and psychologically. If the notion of remembrance was waning due to less and less first-hand experience of past wars, then it has been firmly put back to the forefront of our consciousness by the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

We may not experience the fear of families who wait for the knock on the door, the military wives who proudly, in one of their other videos, hold up pictures of their loved ones fighting abroad, but that does not mean that we cannot stand, irrespective of our views on war, in solidarity with them at this time of remembrance; as God waits with them, often unseen, and the love of God in Jesus Christ supports them when the world feels as if it has fallen apart. The least we can do is remember, but we remember in faith and in hope

“If God is for us, who can be against us? Certainly not God, who did not even keep back his own Son, but offered him for us all.”
(Rom 8: 31-2)

The analogy is clear. As those who have served and died, have given up their lives for their country, so Christ has given up his life for the world. If we honour the soldiers killed and injured, by their actions; so we come to understand just what God has given up for us. Few have stood on the battlefield, but we recognise their sacrifice, in the giving of their all. In Jesus Christ, for what he has done for us, it is not just honour that is due, for in acquitting us, he asks only for our lives.

The poppy, the war memorial, both symbolic of our remembrance; the cross, more than a symbol of the actions of God, it is where the love and the justice of God came together. *“Who, then, can separate us from the love of Christ? Can trouble do it, or hardship or persecution or hunger or poverty or danger or death?”* (Rom 8: 35) Paul says there is nothing the world can do to really harm us. The unknown, including death, should hold no fear.

So in death where is victory? The death of any life is a waste, and any sense of victory can only come through some knowledge that what you fight for is just, and that you are making a difference. How often have we heard the families of

the bereaved in war say that strength and comfort come to them, in the sure knowledge that they died doing a job they loved and were fighting for a cause they believed in. As Christians, what we can say without any doubt, is the victory of Christ over death, no matter how we might understand that act of God, this is our source of hope and faith.

“No, in all these things we have complete victory through him who loved us!³⁸ For I am certain that nothing can separate us from his love: neither death nor life, neither angels nor other heavenly rulers or powers, neither the present nor the future,³⁹ neither the world above nor the world below—there is nothing in all creation that will ever be able to separate us from the love of God which is ours through Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Paul firmly believes that no matter the hardships of this world, they will triumph because of what God has already done. Let us bring that same hope and faith to our remembrance.

This was the faith of the Psalmist. Whether people are literally shaken in their home by falling bombs or their lives have been shattered by bereavement or injury, God is still our shelter and strength, ready to help in all times of trouble, that is our faith and hope to be shared with the world. Whether there are people terrified by what is happening in their nation or if feels like the whole world has fallen apart. God is with them, he is their refuge; that is our hope and faith to be shared with the world.

As we remember the fallen, and I fear those who will continue to fall, maybe the greatest words of hope and faith are these, *“Come and see what the LORD has done. See what amazing things he has done on earth. He stops wars all over the world; he breaks bows, destroys spears, and sets shields on fire. “Stop fighting,” he says, “and know that I am God.”*

In the midst of the reality of the world in which we live, the impossible dream or a message we owe to the world? In a world where many turn to the bullet first; is this foolish thinking, or our ultimate trust and hope in God for the future.

Amen.