

Sermon: Remembrance Sunday St Giles, Gt Wishford.

John 15: 9-15

The Cumbrian farmer James Rebanks writes this in his book *The Shepherd's Life*:

“The past and the present live alongside each other in our working lives, overlapping and intertwining, until it is sometimes hard to know where one ends and the other starts. Each annual task is also a memory of the many times we have done it before and the people we did it with. As long as the work goes on, the men and women that once did it with us live on as well, part of what we are doing, part of our stories and memories, part of how and why we do these things.”

Each observation of Remembrance Sunday is a memory of the many times we have done it before and the people we did it with. How could it be otherwise? None of us remembers the first Armistice Day, although some will remember some who did. Some will remember the Second World War; some will have known people who gave their lives or their health in that or other, conflicts. Some will know or have known people who lived through either or both. For others, that is unimaginable history. Some will have served, or know people who have served, or will have lost friends, or will know people who have lost friends, in one or other of the many conflicts since. The majority, at least in this country, will have a consciousness that war and conflict are all

around, and will have no direct experience of them. Each of us will “remember” in our own unique way.

But the strength of today’s commemoration - the point of this morning’s ceremonies - is that we do this together, in community. Even those unable to attend a service like this may watch the national commemoration at the Cenotaph. As long as the commemorations go on, the men and women that once commemorated with us live on as well, part of what we are doing, part of our stories and memories, part of how and why we do this thing.

That remembrance will be linked with gratitude. Gratitude for those who gave their lives or health. Gratitude for those who returned and gratitude for the miracle of the village of Stapleford whose children all returned from the wars, though brought with them the scars of the experience. Gratitude for those who, today, stand ready to serve, to risk their lives and health. For we give thanks not for the deaths of those who gave their tomorrows for our today, but for the lives of service leading up to that sacrifice. And, linked with that, must go the resolution that we must never take for granted that sacrifice or those who live that willingness.

But what about God - as we are remembering in Church this Sunday. Did God desire this sacrifice? No.

Yet God understood it, and understands still. For His sacrifice, his once for all, timeless and universal, giving of himself for his friends - for their future, so that they, we, can have a 'tomorrow'.

Abide in me Jesus bids us - I will be your shelter, your strength, the light which leads you and the love which binds you. We are united in him, with each other and those who have gone before us and will come after us. It is a mystery and a victory. A victory, not of jingoism or self-congratulation, but one deeper and greater - a life beyond the one we see. A dimension in which love, generosity, kindness and compassion are stronger than the brutality of power, ambition and violence. There is evidence of this every day despite the grimness of the news, the ghastly crippling and demoralising effects of war. We CAN see it, if we look for it, images of soldiers working together, sharing and watching out for each other; the generosity of strangers, and opening of hearts and homes; extraordinary heroism and ground-breaking innovations in medicine and technology, which in themselves give life;

And when we see this dimension, it helps. We can imagine better the continuity of our community. It comforts us and energises us to do likewise, to give more in and of our lives to others, strangers perhaps but friends nonetheless.

This is a taste of the fruit of which Jesus speaks, the outworking of abiding in him and obeying his commandment to love one another.

Those who gave their lives for us - the lives of Leonard Chivers, (shepherd) Stanley Gray (carpenter), William Head (too young to have had a trade before he was killed), Edward Middlewick (who died at home 2 years after medical discharge), and all those named today, and more, from battles and wars past and present, must never be forgotten nor wasted, and we must honour them by living as they died - for others. So as we remember their valiant hearts, as we express our deepest gratitude, as we pledge to work with increased determination and energy for peace, may we know God who invites us to abide in him, who also made the ultimate sacrifice, and may we bear the lasting fruit of love and peace - as a continuous community both at home and beyond.