

~ however long you have been Christian ~ to revisit what you believe and why. The Sessions will be held here ~ so check your diaries **NOW** and book the time out ~ 4.30 - 6.00 for Admission to Communion and 7.00 - 8.30 for Confirmation preparation. There will, of course, be Ash Wednesday (14th February) and Holy Week (beginning 26th March) as the usual special extra observances we offer ~ all at 8pm until Good Friday where there will be times of observation throughout the day.

Pay attention to your own nurturing and nourishing in readiness for Easter ~ then together we will be blessed with the renewed understanding of the words of Wisdom we have on our insert sheet to take away and reflect on. ~ We will seek and find Wisdom ~ we will discern her presence and in doing so will recognise God walking with us ~ communicating His love and peace through Jesus and the Spirit and by His grace will banish the desperation that feels God does not have time for us. He has time for all of us and unconditional, outrageous love ~ the question is do we have time for God and love Him as He loves us?

When we do ~ we know Jesus and we make Him known!

Amen.

In a moment we will use the fourth verse of another war poem ~ by Robert Laurence Binyon (1869– 1943) familiar words for today that will lead us into our silent Act of Remembrance.

Do take time to look up the whole poem ~ it is called "For the Fallen"

Sermon Notes ~ Remembrance Sunday 12th November, 2017

A number of years back now Robert told Barbara and me that he very much wanted to visit the War Graves in France and the Menin Gate in Belgium ~ his family had lost his great uncle missing in battle ~ and would we mind if we spent some of our holiday just paying our respects as he felt somehow he needed to do this?

We had no reason to mind and so that hot summer we drove along the roads through Flanders fields, covered with the red of poppies and the blue of cornflowers; visited Tyne Cot, The Thiépval Memorial, The Arras Memorial and a number of others; some with museums and exhibitions others standing alone, disturbed only by birdsong. Then we drove through to Belgium and stood under the Menin Gate.

Each place held an echo of peace that we had not anticipated ~ each touched something in our inner being that we had not been aware existed, Standing under the Menin Gate I was suddenly aware that all three of us had tears streaming down our faces ~ silent, unashamed grief for something we had no say or involvement in ~ no personal experience ~ and yet. We spend a while standing, walking through and looking up. Robert realised that Barbara and I had stopped and as he joined us saw, as we had, his great uncles name ~ one amongst 10's of thousands of men never recovered from the mud of the battlefield; known as 'The Missing'.

As each year passes and those who were involved pass on ~ we have their recorded memories ~ memories that cost them so much to voice; memories that for years they buried deep and would not share in a hope they would spare their horror of memory and the heartache of their listeners.

Recently each year has recognised a special anniversary and we have been helped to remember. ~ This year it is 75 years since the RAF was formed on 1st February 1942 and the Battle specifically remembered is that of Passchendaele.

Eight years ago the poet Dan Lake made similar visits to the war graves and memorials that we had made. ~ Listen to his words ~

On These Fields of Passchendaele

On these fields of Passchendaele, skylarks sing and cattle graze;
in these fields of Flanders lives were spent in far off days.
No hint of what went on here! No sign of blood and bones;
but sixty thousand souls rest here beneath the white headstones;
on these fields of Passchendaele, where roam the silent sheep,
the only sound the wailing winds; those mothers who still weep:
Over fields of Passchendaele.....

On these fields of Passchendaele, men walked against the fire,
while lead and splinters fell like rain, they clung to bloodied wire.
They prayed to God almighty that this day they might get through,
but Gods not listening Tommy son, he hasn't time for you
on these fields of Passchendaele; where donkey's planned their war.
Far from the filthy trenches they were spared what lion's saw
on these fields of Passchendaele...

On these fields of Passchendaele I stand without a clue
of what you poor men suffered, or what you had to do.
But I can feel your pain as a vice surrounds my heart,
that crushes breath within me till it forces tears to start
for men who died so bloodily, from gas or lead and shell,
who drowned in blood and mud, in this place of utter hell:
On these fields of Passchendaele....



Many of the fields today are set to farming or lay fallow and of course many contain the war memorials ~ row upon row of white headstones.

But what of that faith in God ~ the God that desperately Dan Lake pens had no time for the men in the mud and horror? Our Scripture contradicts that desperation ~ it tells us clearly in our epistle today (1 Thessalonians 4: 13-18) that the Lord himself will be with believers and that we will be with our Lord forever. That doesn't deny the feelings that Dan describes ~ and if we want to know why we only have to look to our Gospel.

It might not seem obvious to begin with ~ the parable is about the ten virgins ~ a traditional part of the Jewish wedding celebrations ~ where the feast is waited for and comes often unexpectedly but all who have been invited are expected to be ready to attend, We are told that of the ten virgins those who were foolish overlooked the time that they might wait to greet the bridegroom on his return and they did not take spare supplies of oil with them but the wise among them took plenty! The bridegroom returns at midnight and of course to foolish have used all their oil waiting. They asked the wise to share what they have but are told go and buy more ~ meaning that they will miss their place in the celebrations. The foolish would have experienced a desperation ~ the emptiness of realising that they did not recognise God with them because they had not kept up their preparations.

You and I can easily wander into that wilderness ~ the emotional emptiness of not feeling God walking with us ~ because we neglect our preparation. We expect our faith to be automatic ~ it is not ~ it needs nurturing and nourishing and just being in church once a week and hearing the sermons simply is not enough ~ we all need to attend to that we have neglected.

Through February and March next year ~ Lent ~ I expect we will offer some study or book to read but also I will use the Thursday evenings to run Admission to Communion and Confirmation preparation. I intend to open these sessions not just to those who want to make this step in their faith commitment ~ but to all of you