

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE
WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON
Sermon – Third Sunday before Advent – Remembrance Sunday
10th November 2024

Oppède

The Revd Roxana Tenea Teleman, Assistant Chaplain

'For everything there is a season, a time for every matter under heaven,' we read in the Book of Ecclesiastes.

Today is a time for remembrance, a time to let the weight of war's reality touch our souls. It is a day of mixed emotions for all who observe Remembrance Sunday across the world. For some it is a moment of gratitude, when recalling memories. For others, it stirs pride in the courage and dedication of their national armed forces. Some mourn with a heavy sense of loss, while some, like myself, are deeply thankful to have been spared the direct experience of armed conflict.

This day calls us to remembrance and to silence. The two minutes of silence we observed, though fleeting, offered a respite from the endless noise of our thoughts, opening a space in which we could confront the enormity of what war has meant - for our nations, for those who served, and for those who gave their lives.

In the face of war's stark and merciless power, juxtaposed against the fragile, precious lives it consumes, silence becomes the only fitting response. It is the silence that can hold the depth of our feelings, the weight of memory, and the stirrings of imagination. It is the silence that can open our hearts to God's presence.

This same silence echoes the historic moment when the fighting in First World War ended: the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month. A rare recording captures the precise moment of the ceasefire at the River Moselle. The relentless thunder of gunfire continues until two minutes to eleven. By one minute past, all falls still. Into that quiet comes a sound long forgotten - birdsong, the first fragile notes of peace.

One witness to that moment reflected, “Well do you know, strangely enough, we wept, because the silence was so awful. You see, we’d been used to the noise of guns, all day long, all day long, all day long... it was so strange, to have silence.”

With the incomprehensible loss of life in that war, the Armistice of 1918 brought not only the silence of peace but also the silence of grief, echoing through virtually every community - the haunting silence of the *Lost Generation*, sons, brothers and friends who never returned to talk, sing, live, or breathe. again

The silence we held today honours that generation. Within it, we hear the voices of the First World War poets - Wilfred Owen, Siegfried Sassoon, Robert Graves, or Rupert Brooke, the latter of whom died just three weeks after his sonnet, *The Soldier*, was read at St Paul’s Cathedral in London on Easter Sunday 1915.

Though the WWI may feel distant, it remains a stark epitome of war’s horror: the fear, chaos, destruction, and relentless carnage. It was a conflict many hoped would announce the birth of a brighter, more enlightened era – a time when, in the words of prophet Micah, people would “... beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.”

Yet that hope remains elusive. In 2023, the Collins Dictionary declared *permacrisis* its word of the year – a term reflecting our era’s prolonged instability, insecurity, and unending cascade of catastrophic events. The world seems awash in terror and fear, and the forces of rage appear unchecked. Once more, war darkens Europe; once more, violence erupts on Mediterranean shores. Human ingenuity continues to fuel the engines of death and destruction, with colossal sums of money are poured into weapons of war. Over 80 million people are displaced by conflict today. Civilian suffering has grown exponentially: from 5 per cent of wartime fatalities at the dawn of the 20th century, to 15 per cent in World War I, to 65 per cent by the close of the Second, and now over 90 per cent in the wars of the 1990s and beyond.

War is always a visceral demonstration of human failure. How delicate is the boundary that separates civilization from barbarism! No era, no place is immune to the consequences of human frailty and arrogance, or the missteps of misguided and misleading leadership.

And so, we hold the silence of gratitude - thankful for eighty years of unbroken peace in our small corner of the world, for the freedoms we cherish and so often take for granted. In that silence, we remember those who gave their lives in the cause of justice and peace, and we hold them in the silent love of God – each life a unique and irreplaceable gift. We give thanks, as well, for the young men and women who continue to step forward, offering themselves to confront the brutality that still ignites in so many parts of the globe, safeguarding our lives and liberties.

But this silence is also a call to action – a commitment to the work of peace. Though divisions and conflicts scar God’s world, we hold fast to his promise: “He makes wars cease in all the world” (Psalm 46.9). This is the heart of God for his creation, the vision toward which he calls us – the peace that redeems and restores.

In today’s Gospel reading, we encountered the disciples - Simon Peter and Andrew, James and John - fishermen called by Jesus to leave their nets and follow him. The quiet simplicity of this scene, with nets cast and mended on the shores, evokes a sense of peace. Yet Jesus calls them not into calm waters, but into the turbulence of a world in need. In the face of hostility, Jesus does not raise an army; he builds a community. He calls disciples not to fight for a nation or cause, but to live and serve in a new, transformative way, as people of God’s kingdom. This call asks of them the ultimate gift: not to win battles, but to embody peace and draw others toward the kingdom of God.

As we pause in silence to remember and give thanks, we, too, are invited to be part of that peace-making community. In an age marked by the resurgence of nationalism across Europe and beyond, and as public discourse grows increasingly harsh, the call to be peacemakers, rooted in Christ’s love has never been more urgent. For, in the words of Mahatma Ghandi, “Peace is not something that you [only] wish for. It is something that you make, something that you do, something that you are, something that you give away.”

May the silence we shared this morning be one of those moments when we sense the gentle touch of God’s hand in the affairs of humankind - a silence that nourishes hope and reassures us of God’s presence with those who suffer. In his faithfulness, God leads us, as we will later sing, to that eternal homeland whose “ways are ways of gentleness, and all her paths are peace.”

God's faithfulness assures us that violence and death are not the final word in our story, whether as individuals or as a community. There is a deeper, truer narrative in which we all share: the story of God's forgiveness and peace. These will endure, for they are the eternal reality into which God is drawing us.

He who has promised is faithful – may the Lord grant us his peace!

Amen.