

## **Sermon for 10<sup>th</sup> November 2024, Year B, Remembrance Sunday**

**Preached at St Serf's Shettleston**

**Jonah 3:1-5,10; Psalm 62:5-end; Hebrews 9:24-end; Mark 1:14-20**

### **Sermon by the Revd Jane Horton**

I have always found Remembrance Sunday a profoundly moving occasion.

Although as the Episcopal Church we do not share the civic responsibility of the Church of Scotland, we still rightly remember and honour the memories of all service personnel and civilians who laid down their lives, as well as those who suffered life-changing mental scars and physical injuries, in two world wars, international conflicts and peace-keeping missions since.

Yet perhaps for you, as for me, these annual acts of remembrance are made even more poignant and painful by the acute awareness that despite the horrors of those two world wars and brutal conflicts since; despite our hopes and prayers and the tireless efforts of those who are called to be peace-makers, the world seems to be further from peace and justice, reconciliation and restoration than ever.

It can often feel as though we are powerless bystanders:

as we bear witness to the heart-breaking tragedy of Israel and Gaza, Lebanon, and the West Bank and the ripple effects of that ancient conflict being felt throughout the Middle East and dividing so many communities around the world;

Bystanders, as we watch Ukraine preparing to enter the fourth year of its desperate fight for territorial integrity and sovereign survival against the aggressive military might of Russia, a conflict that originally began in 1914;

Bystanders, as we hear about the latest round of the catastrophic civil war in Sudan that has seen hundreds of thousands killed and millions displaced over many decades.

There are of course so many other conflicts in other parts of the world on a smaller scale less reported in the media.

A seemingly endless cycle of human beings' inhumanity towards other human beings.

And whilst political leaders around the world, international organisations, media commentators and ordinary folk like ourselves may all have our opinions, God alone knows what impact the recent US elections may ultimately have upon prospects for global peace and stability.

Even living in a comparatively peaceful and prosperous democracy like ours, many of us may feel quite fearful and even despairing at times in the midst of much that is so appalling and uncertain in the wider world. I know I do.

So this Remembrance Sunday, as we pause once again to remember the terrible cost of human conflict, not only to combatants but to the millions of innocents unwittingly caught up in war, the question I pose myself and us all is how – as people of faith – we can hold onto hope and trust in God in dark and troubled times?

How do we keep on seeking to be channels of God's love, God's peace and God's justice? In our families and communities, in our nation and, in Jesus's own words, 'to the ends of the earth'? (*Acts 1*)

As many people around the world and in the United States adjust to an unwelcome new political reality this week, perhaps it's fitting to quote the words of an American pastor, author and activist, Brian McLaren, who asks these questions in his latest book, published earlier this year. (*Life after Doom*)

*What does faith look like when cynicism seems more plausible?*

*What does hope look like when hope seems irrational?*

*What does love look like when hate becomes more popular?*

As we think about those questions, I wonder if any of this week's readings can offer us any comfort or helpful pointers ...

Our Gospel reading from Mark today is a very familiar one, the calling of Jesus' first disciples: Simon Peter, his brother, Andrew and the sons of Zebedee, James and John.

We know the story – when Jesus invites these Galilean fishermen to follow him, they respond immediately, leaving their occupations behind.

But on closer reading, we notice that this significant event follows the arrest of Jesus' cousin, John the Baptist.

They too were living in dark and troubled times.

Like Jonah in our Old Testament reading, John has been preaching repentance and baptising people in the River Jordan, including Jesus himself.

Now John's fearless 'speaking truth to power' offends and embarrasses both the Jewish authorities and the Roman occupiers' puppet ruler, King Herod. And his imprisonment will ultimately lead to execution.

I wonder how much Jesus is aware of all this as he returns from his forty days of prayer and fasting in the Judean wilderness and makes his way to Galilee to call these first disciples and to begin his public ministry?

I think there's a strong sense in the gospel accounts that Jesus knows his own calling will inevitably lead him into confrontation with the Jewish religious authorities and the occupying Roman state and, like John, his eventual arrest will lead to unjust and brutal death.

He speaks of it frequently to his disciples. Warns them that following him will mean picking up their own crosses in different ways.

Warns us ...

So what might it mean to set our faces afresh to follow Jesus in our own troubled times?

What might be the crosses he's asking us to bear? Or the things we need to leave behind?

What can we do that's going to make any difference in our broken world?

'Nothing' is not an option for any of us of course, for "*the only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing*" as the saying goes.

So perhaps we can start by each asking the Lord to show us specifically what unique part He has for us to play in **being** His love, His light and His peace in our wounded and warring world.

The one thing we can all do without exception is to pray ...

If we find ourselves at a complete loss for words in the face of so much that is so wrong, then perhaps those are the moments for simply waiting on God in silence like the psalmist ...

Or praying the *Lord's Prayer* –

*your kingdom come*

*your will be done ...*

Or the *Kyrie* –

*Lord, have mercy, Christ have mercy ...*

Or, thinking of Paul's allusion to Christ's second coming in our Hebrews reading today, praying

*Maranatha! Come, Lord Jesus!*

The hope behind Julian of Norwich's famous words, *All shall be well and all shall be well and all manner of things shall be well*. She too lived in dark and troubled times.

Come, Lord! Come quickly to bring healing to the nations and to set all things to rights.

So we're called to pray. But I believe that as Christians we're also called to be compassionate and open-hearted in welcoming and offering sanctuary to refugees displaced by conflict. Something we can certainly celebrate and support here in Glasgow, with its wonderful reputation for doing just that. Tess and I spent yesterday evening at a social event organised by my sister in Falkirk that included many asylum seekers and refugees.

Some of us may already be volunteering in our local communities or feel drawn to volunteer in different ways ... or to become more actively involved in politics and specifically working towards peace and justice in our nation and the wider world.

And of course we can all donate – and keep on donating – as generously as we are able, to the many worthy aid agencies whose workers often put their own lives at risk as they seek to alleviate the suffering of those caught up in war zones –

Remember the widow's mite: every little helps!

In our psalm today, facing troubled times themselves, the psalmist encourages us to turn to God afresh too.

I'm going to close now by reading an extract from Carla Grosch-Miller's take on Psalm 62 from *Psalms Redux*.

*For You alone my soul waits in silence,*

*You, my home and my hope.*

*In You, I rest secure.*

*Drawing from Your deep well,  
I am strengthened.*

*The core of my being is firm and gentle –  
I know who I am.*

*There is room in me to love the unlovely,  
to ponder slings and arrows  
without retribution,  
to remain quiet when there is nothing to say  
and to speak when it is time to speak.*

*The whole of my being  
is held in Your steady hands.  
I have nothing to fear,  
and everything to learn.*

*So it is for we who trust,  
we who wait in silence.*

*The waiting is a revealing.  
The eye sees the folly in vain chasing  
after power, wealth and privilege.  
The mind notes the clutch and cling  
of insecure humanity.  
The heart seeks to pledge, saying:  
As for me, I want to be a blessing  
to heaven and on earth.*

*Once God has spoken,  
twice I have heard:  
Love is found in want and in waiting;  
the Holy draws us in  
and strengthens us to stand.*

**Amen.**