

## Remembrance Sunday

Isaiah 2: 2-5 and James 3: 13-18

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*"At the going down of the sun and in the morning, we will remember them..."*

Words penned by Laurence Binyan in mid-September 1914 a few weeks after the outbreak of the first world war. British forces had suffered massive casualties and Binyan in his poem 'Ode to Remembrance' reflects on loss and death and life everlasting. And today, aided by Binyan's words, we come together to remember and to honour those who have died in the fight for justice and the cause of peace. We look back today with deep gratitude. For their service and their sacrifice, for our freedom, which has seen been protected by those who have served and continue to serve in the armed forces since The Great War. To you we want to say thank you.

We are not where we were when Binyan penned his poem, there has been much progress and development in global solidarity and yet the world feels like it is creaking, groaning, unravelling with conflict and catastrophe both at scale between nations and on our streets between neighbours. It was the futurist Jamais Cascio who when describing the world we live in used the words... brittle, anxious, nonlinear and incomprehensible. We are in desperate need for wisdom, for peace, for hope. Themes that run like a golden thread through our service today.

I love the Psalm sung earlier, Psalm 90 which speaks of God's majesty, a God through whom such peace and hope are possible. *"Lord, thou hast been our refuge: from one generation to another. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever the earth and the world were made: thou art God from everlasting, and world without end. For a thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday: seeing that is past as a watch in the night."* In a brittle, anxious, nonlinear and at times incomprehensible world – the Psalmist encourages us that God is our refuge, that God is still ruling and reigning and comforting and sustaining us in our fragility. The Psalmist likens us to grass that grows and fades. And yet God is constant, he remains from one generation to another. And the Psalmist goes on to pray a beautiful prayer... *'So teach us to number our days. That we may gain a heart of wisdom.'* Today as we are reminded in our remembrance of the sanctity and fragility of life. Lord, teach us to number our days and make us wise in how we use them.

I think we'd all like to think that we are wise or at least growing in wisdom. Each day I discover an ever-increasing number of grey hairs which I am telling myself are outward and visible signs of inner and growing wisdom. I wish that were true but James here tells us that true wisdom on the outside has inner, deeper roots... purity, peace, consideration, sincerity and mercy. We have all seen examples where so called "wisdom" is far from those things and as James writes *the fruit of bitter envy or selfish ambition*. And we're good at pointing this out when we see it in others. But James says these are qualities that all humanity, have the ability of harbouring in their heart. To 'harbour' is an active decision, to allow bitty envy or

selfish ambition to dock quietly in the harbour of our hearts until it has spread throughout the whole quay.

You may be here today and you have been harbouring feelings towards another person or people group. Whether knowingly, or unknowingly. Feelings of resentment, unforgiveness, hatred, perhaps even bitter envy. If envy is the desire for what another has, bitter envy is the anger or hate created by not having it yourself. Again, Psalm 90 speaks to this: *"You have set our secret sins in the light of your presence."* The light of God is not only comfort; it is also challenge. It calls us to see ourselves honestly - to reckon with the shadows in our own history and in our own hearts.

It may be that your heart today is filled, not with bitter envy but with the pain of losing someone you loved, someone who you are remembering today. Today is a day to remember but and in our remembering to also pray for peace, for healing, for restoration. Today may be the next step, in the light of God's presence to heal and to be restored.

We see this in Isaiah's great vision – one of the most famous images of peace in all of Scripture: *"They shall beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks."* It is a vision not merely of the end of war, but of the transformation of human purpose. The very instruments of conflict becoming tools of cultivation; destruction giving way to growth and new beginnings. This vision is both spiritual and practical. Isaiah imagines nations streaming to the mountain of God to *"learn his ways and walk in his paths."* In other words, peace, wisdom – these qualities we have spoken of today, do come from above, but they are cultivated and developed in the slow, daily grind of patience, discipline, humility and forgiveness. Peace is not an abstract ideal. We remember today that peace is enabled, often at great cost, by people of goodwill in every generation: diplomats and doctors, peacekeepers and teachers, servicemen and women, parents and politicians, each choosing the hard path of reconciliation. Isaiah says: *"Come ye, and let us walk in the light of the Lord."*

How will we live in that light now? How will we honour the memory of those who have died in the fight for justice and the cause of peace? I would suggest by being a people, formed in the likeness of Christ, who seek peace and live with hope. These readings, though written in times of turmoil, end not with despair but with hope. The Psalmist finds comfort in God's eternal presence. Isaiah finds a future where nations learn war no more. James identifies a wisdom that leads to right relationship and peace.

And of course, ultimately, Jesus - who, as we approach the season of advent, we remember how he entered a brittle, anxious, non-linear and incomprehensible world as a fragile baby. That he lived, died and rose again and is with us now through the person and power of the Holy Spirit. You are not alone. You can have hope. Not a shallow optimism, but a resilient faith that goodness will outlast evil and that love is stronger than death.

**O God, our help in ages past, Our hope for years to come, Be thou our guard while troubles last, And our eternal home. Amen.**