

## Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> November 2020 - Remembrance

1 Thessalonians 4: 13-5:11 (The comfort of His coming)

Talk by Andrew Griffiths, Prayers by Julian Providence

Hi, my name is Andrew and thanks for downloading the talk for St John's church for Sunday 8 November 2020 – Remembrance Sunday. I will be reading from 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11, giving a short talk and then Julian will be leading our prayers, before we end.

On this Remembrance Day, as with most things in 2020, what we were used to doing in person we now have to do virtually, but it also speaks to the situation that we have in our country now. So, we still think it is important for us to remember those who act to bring peace and to reflect on the horrendous impact of conflict on lives in the past and the present.

### Reading

Our reading this morning is from 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11

13 Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. 14 For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. 15 According to the Lord's word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. 16 For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord for ever. 18 Therefore encourage one another with these words.

5 Now, brothers and sisters, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, 2 for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. 3 While people are saying, 'Peace and safety', destruction will come on them suddenly, as labour pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.

4 But you, brothers and sisters, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. 5 You are all children of the light and children of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. 6 So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be awake and sober. 7 For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. 8 But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. 9 For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. 10 He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. 11 Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.

### Talk

In 1918, as the first world war raged, Siegfried Sassoon, an officer in the British army decorated with the Military Cross, wrote a poem imagining death.

Entitled *To His Dead Body* Sassoon wrote:

*When roaring gloom surged inward and you cried,  
Groping for friendly hands, and clutched, and died,  
Like racing smoke, swift from your lolling head  
Phantoms of thought and memory thinned and fled.*

*Yet, though my dreams that throng the darkened stair  
Can bring me no report of how you fare,  
Safe quit of wars, I speed you on your way  
Up lonely, glimmering fields to find new day,  
Slow-rising, saintless, confident and kind—  
Dear, red-faced father God who lit your mind.*

Sassoon was writing about his expectation of death, something that was a reality around him in the trenches. He had seen many around him die, including his brother, so for Sassoon, death was an ever-present reality.

And in conflict, this is not something that only affects soldiers.

We know that almost 90% of casualties in war are civilians – just look at the conflicts in Syria, Yemen and so many other places, where the devastation forces people from their homes, destroys their houses and forces people to seek refuge in other countries.

And the politics of refugees means that a lot of the time, countries (including ours) are reluctant to accept and help desperate people.

Conflict is not a good thing; it is the opposite of development and it destroys lives and societies.

As we come together for our Act of Remembrance, it is in the spirit of the first remembrance, to remember the pain, horror and waste of war – it is not for us to glorify war, but to mourn it and the terrible pain it caused back in 1918 and continues to cause now.

But as Christians, we know that pain, death and suffering, whilst a reality now, are not part of our everlasting future.

Isaiah 2:2-5 makes this famous declaration, of the promise of peace.

It says:

In the last days the mountain of the Lord's temple will be established  
as the highest of the mountains;  
it will be exalted above the hills,  
and all nations will stream to it.

<sup>3</sup> Many peoples will come and say,

'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord,  
to the temple of the God of Jacob.

He will teach us his ways,  
so that we may walk in his paths.'

The law will go out from Zion,

the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

<sup>4</sup> He will judge between the nations  
and will settle disputes for many peoples.  
They will beat their swords into ploughshares  
and their spears into pruning hooks.  
Nation will not take up sword against nation,  
nor will they train for war any more.

<sup>5</sup> Come, descendants of Jacob,  
let us walk in the light of the Lord.

And our passage this morning addresses the question of how Christians are to cope with death, before the Day of the Lord promised in Isaiah.

It makes two clear points:

Firstly, it deals with the concern that the new Christians had at the time – they had expected Jesus' return before too long, but then some Christians started aging, getting ill and dying.

They wanted to know what this meant for eternal life – and Paul, writing this letter to the people of Thessalonica, spoke beautifully to them of the hope that we have of Christ's return.

Christ's return will be followed by the rising to life of all of those who have died in faith – it will be the bringing together of all who have lived and died as Christians, under the everlasting banner of God's kingdom.

Death is defeated, life will triumph.

As we gather in our act of remembrance, and as we also deal with the huge challenges and turmoil of Covid and lockdown, let us remember this – no matter how bleak, no matter how much death seems to be winning, we have the certain hope that life will prevail.

Faith in God's love, shown through the life, death and resurrection of Christ Jesus, is our hope of eternal life.

Secondly, Paul makes it clear that we are to encourage one another to live lives that are worthy of Christ's church.

He says, in verse 8-11: that we should put 'on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.'

In difficult times, just as was faced by those on the Western front, and now those on the front line of the fight against Covid, Christians are called to live by example, to encourage and to build one another up.

So, as we gather now for the act of remembrance, we will pray for peace in the world, but more than that, let us live lives that encourage peace.

Yes, we could work for world peace and the cessation of all wars, but if that is beyond you (as it is me!), then think about the small conflicts you have in your life – how can you be the peacemaker in them, how can you follow the example of Christ and love even those who would be your enemy?

### **Let us pray**

Dear Lord, we commit ourselves to work in penitence and faith for reconciliation between the nations, that all people may, together, live in freedom, justice and peace.

We pray for all who in bereavement, disability and pain continue to suffer the consequences of fighting and terror.

We remember with thanksgiving and sorrow those whose lives, in world wars and conflicts past and present, have been given and taken away.

Ever-living God we remember those whom you have gathered from the storm of war into the peace of your presence; may that same peace calm our fears, bring justice to all peoples and establish harmony among the nations, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Amen.**

### **And now Julian will bring us our prayers**

Father on this Remembrance Sunday we turn our thoughts to wars past and present, bringing to mind those who gave up their lives in the two world wars of the 20th Century and the many that have occurred since. We thank you for the sacrifice of so many in the First and Second World Wars, unseen and unknown by us, that they chose to fight against the spread of such evil across the world. Thank you that because of their sacrifice so many across Europe live in nations that are democratic and peaceful and safe. Help us Lord never to take this hard won gift for granted.

We remember war is part of our fallen and sinful nature and not something you have ever wanted for our world. Help us to see wars as you see them Lord Jesus, remembering the suffering and destruction of those doing the fighting and those caught in between. We remember the many conflict zones around our world today. We lift to you Yemen, Syria, Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Libya, Sudan and Somalia.

We think of those many millions of people caught up in the crossfire of war, facing death or extreme hardship or displaced from their homes. We think of children orphaned and traumatised and lives and livelihoods destroyed. We think of armies mobilised to fight with so many killed or with life-changing and physical and mental injuries.

Father this is not the world you created and you felt deep sorrow when you saw how the world you created had become filled with violence. God of peace we know that one day you will bring an end to all war but for now Lord by the power of your Spirit would you protect the vulnerable caught up in conflict, provide refugees with food, shelter and safe passage. Would you bring conflicts to an end so that suffering and loss of life are minimised and help leaders to seek peace and forgiveness.

We pray for our armed forces, remembering the sacrifice they have made for us. Please would you heal those physically and mentally wounded in war. Lead our government to provide all they need to heal and rebuild their lives.

We pray for the US election you that your will be done whoever wins the election. Please enable the election result to be settled peacefully and as soon as possible and Holy Spirit would you guide the president to govern with integrity and for the good of the whole country.

We lift our own nation as well as the others across Europe, many of whom are now in strict lockdowns. This is the time we need your wisdom and power for our government and governments across the world fighting the pandemic, even though governments do not know or acknowledge you. In your mercy Lord please lead the world through this difficult time. We pray for your hand to be with those working on vaccines and treatments for coronavirus and seeking to understand the illness better. Give them your knowledge and guidance Lord.

We pray your protection over those for whom another lockdown means loss of a job or income, anxiety and isolation and loss contact with loved ones or friends. We pray for those who need medical treatment that the NHS will still be able to provide all they need, especially with winter coming.

Thank you so much that we have a government that is trying to steer a difficult path through the pandemic. Please continue to guide them.

We pray for all of us at St John's - all of us with different needs at this time. You know each and every one of us. Thank you for your promise that you provide for all our needs. Help us to continue to trust you as our loving father whose eye is always upon us. We lift to you the needs of our church family:

We thank you for bringing Mick, Kate, Lucy and Sophie through the coronavirus. Please Lord we ask you to heal them deeply so that there is no lasting effect from the illness.

We lift Ian and Val's daughter Lucy and her husband Tom following their marriage last Wednesday. Please be with them as they start their new journey together and comfort them over any sense of loss that they weren't able to have the wedding they planned. We pray also your blessing also over Ian and Val thanking you for all they do as a couple for our church family.

We pray for Alison's sister-in-law treatment will continue and that you will make it effective. We also pray for Alison's sister that you would stabilise her and ensure she too gets the treatment she needs. We pray for your strength to sustain Alison.

We pray for those in our family who need a healing touch Lord:

- for Val for treatment of her myeloma and continued rehabilitation of her mobility.
- Lorraine for continued healing of her shoulder.
- for Audrey for healing for her hip following surgery and strengthening of her mobility. Please be with her as she adjusts to being on her own after family have been caring for her.
- we pray for the continued healing of Anthony's mind.
- for Yvette's sister to get well
- for Eva, that, Lord, you would place your healing hand upon her. Calm the reflux and soothe her pain. Please cause her medication to be effective. Watch over Alex and Andrew and help them to find rest.

- we pray for CAP, asking for you to continue to be with Lynn, Gareth and Rachael. Bless their work and sustain them. Thank you that their work shines the light of your love for people in the darkness of debt.

- we thank you also for how your love is shown through Amaze Penge, supporting parents and children with special needs. Thank you for Cherry who has faithfully fully carried on this work throughout the pandemic. Please sustain her and we pray over the parents and children who come that you would make Amaze Penge a sanctuary of love and friendship.

We pray that you would be with each and every one of us, your children here at St John's. Please Lord continue to go ahead of us as we prepare to become one family with Holy Trinity and ready us even now for all that you will do through this new church.

Finally, we pray...

**Our father in heaven**

**Hallowed be your name**

**Your kingdom come**

**Your will be done earth as in heaven Give us today our daily bread**

**Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us**

**Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil**

**For the Kingdom, the Power and the Glory are yours now and forever.**

**Amen.**

**Thank you for listening and God Bless.**