

Parkway Methodist Church

Conduit Place, St. Werburghs, Bristol. BS2 9RU

11am Sunday 9 November 2025 (Remembrance Sunday)

Readings:

Malachi 4:1-2a

Luke 21:5-19

Sermon

Jesus told us - 'Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; ¹¹there will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and plagues; and there will be dreadful portents and great signs from heaven.

Does this ring any bells?

As we come to our time of remembrance, we don't have to look too hard to see how Jesus' prophecy has come true.

2000 years of wars, of natural disasters, and of plagues and human induced traumas across our world.

Many people reject organised religion because they claim all it does is lead to war.

The comedian Jasper Carrott once suggested it was brave people who cause wars – arguing over the oppression of their respective cowards;

“You leave our bunch of cowards alone.

No YOU leave OUR bunch of cowards alone.

And the cowards are sat in the middle saying "It's OK, really, just both leave us alone and we'll be nice and happy.”

Of course, another argument, probably more correctly, says that wars are started and maintained by those who do not have to fight them.

In our current age, you will notice that President Putin is not rolling up his sleeves and heading to stand at the front of the troops in Ukraine shouting “Come on, follow me”... No, modern generals and politicians very much lead from the back (and wherever possible from another country!)

At least in days of old Kings actually went ahead of their armies and put their lives and souls into leadership – not that I'm suggesting we get Charles a nice big horse, or even a tank and send him out on our behalf – although one might point out at least he has served in the armed forces (Navy) unlike most of our political leaders.

What strikes me as most telling in modern warfare is that it is predominantly fought by the 'lower classes' – the 'expendable' poor – and certainly by the young.

So many of our stories of war seem to portray our servicemen and women as fearless, almost superhuman, but this is a fallacy. All too often the reality is that, if you look at a conflict such as the first world war many were frightened, but followed orders anyway.

Some of that was sheer guts and bravery, some of it was a fear response knowing what would happen if they did not – they could be shot as deserters. A sort of Hobson's choice – probable death if you go forward, certain death if you don't.

So much for the war to end all wars. Since then over 200 major conflicts and countless minor conflicts.

Remembrance is not just about remembering our losses – important as that is. It is about learning from those losses also.

I am sure we all have our own memories, family members – stories passed through the generations – friends (old and new).

During the festival of remembrance at the Royal Albert Hall a couple of years ago, there was particular remembrance of the Falklands Conflict. I was in my mid-teens at that time and I remember being terrified when my NI number arrived in the post – because my teenage mind saw a brown envelope “On Her Majesty's Service” and thought I was being enlisted – I didn't know then that the Inland Revenue also served her Majesty!

Fast forward a couple of years. As a member of the Church of the Nazarene one of my friends was in the army. Looking back I'm guessing he was 18/19. One day he was at Church telling me of his experience on tour in Northern Ireland. The next I heard, he had killed himself rather than face another tour of duty. Technically he doesn't “count” as a victim of the “troubles” – but I have remembered him every year since.

When I worked for the YMCA in Weston-super-Mare a young man came to volunteer for me having been invalided out of the army after the first gulf war, during which he parked his armoured RangeRover on a landmine. The bottom vertebrae of his back are fused and according to his doctors he should not be able to walk – good job he's too stubborn to listen to them.

Physically he's OK, but I will never forget the day we were working on my landrover behind his flat near the seafront in Weston. We'd forgotten there was a firework display due, and as soon as the first ‘shell’ exploded above us he dived for cover under the Landie. It took a considerable time to talk him out from under the vehicle – my first experience of the reality of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder – although it wasn't quite recognised as that at the time.

My cousin was a military bandsman and so served as a medic in the second gulf war – he returned home safely, but with stories he still will not tell. But he has talked to me of the trauma he lives with.

As with all our losses, it is important that we remember those who have served, and paid a heavy price – whether loss of life, or life changing injuries – physical and emotional/mental.

All our Bible readings today talk of trying and testing times to come.

We are living in such times, as have so many before us and as will many after us.

We have a responsibility to God to work for peace – not only for the absence of war, but for the presence of justice. This means looking at so much of what is going on in our world and speaking out when it is wrong. We are called to protect the vulnerable, and to advocate for our planet.

Remembrance is part of this process – because as has been said ‘those who do not remember the past are condemned to repeat it’... we must learn and speak out for others to hear.

The symbol of remembrance is the Poppy – nowadays we have a variety of colours;



The red poppies were noted to have been amongst the first flowers to grow on the battlefields of the first world war. They have been associated with the loss of blood, and focus on remembrance of OUR war dead.

The white poppies actually pre-date the red ones. They seek to recognise and remember the dead of ALL nations – you’re no less dead because you were on the ‘other’ side. It’s no less a tragedy. They emphasise the need to work for peace, not only to try to avoid war, but to build reconciliation after war – sooner or later we need to live together again.

Purple poppies commemorate the ‘non-human’, animal deaths in war. Creatures that serve, not of their own choice, but in their relationship with humans - horses, dogs, pigeons and others.

Then the black poppy-rose. Particularly remembering those from black and minority ethnic groups that also have served and died in conflicts – yet whose stories have not necessarily been heard. The black US troops who served in WWII and discovered in their time in England that they were not second class people. The Muslim, Sikh and Hindus from India and across the Commonwealth who joined and served in the RAF in WWII. The Nepalese Gurkhas with their history of service to the UK who are so often not recognised historically.

So as we remember, another video, reminding us of the horror and tragedy of war. I guess most of you will have seen it, it’s considered a comedy classic, but its making has an added significance.

As the actors were due to ‘go over the top’ at the end of the piece two things had not been accounted for. No one told the actors that live explosive charges were to be used, and, even worse, the charges used were bigger than planned. The whole thing was shot in a single take – not least because when the director called ‘cut’ and said to set up for a second take, the actors (who were visibly shaken) refused point blank to do another take. The emotions you see on screen are real!

VIDEO: Blackadder Goes Forth – the Final Push

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NgvB6lwE8E0>

We must commit to remember them – all who serve and have served – in whatever way... and we will commit to work for at time when we will beat their swords into ploughshares and peace will reign.

AMEN.