



## Sermon at the Cathedral Eucharist

Remembrance Sunday

readings: [Amos 5 18-24](#); [Matthew 25 1-13](#).

12 November 2023

“What 3 Words” is a clever way to identify any location in the world. It divides the Earth into 3 metre blocks, assigning to each of them a unique combination of just three words. Although the words are randomly allocated, sometimes their pattern throws up amusing resonances. For example, the much loved cottage in Suffolk with its garden overlooking the Alde Estuary, that the Flintham family have a strong affiliation with, having holidayed in it for the last 12 years, is located by the 3 words “cherished. hedge. strong” and the stop-over hotel that we stay in is identified by the 3 words “discrepancy. nozzle. overpaid”!

As one who never knowingly uses 3 words when 17 can convey the same meaning, yet is mindful of the tradition here that preachers on Remembrance Sunday should offer a shorter sermon so folk can get to the War Memorial in the Market Place on time, I contemplated what 3 words I could use to sum up an appropriate message for this day.

What 3 Words for Remembrance Sunday? I offer you: “*sacrifice. memorial. silence*”.

*Sacrifice*: The First World War, the so-called Great War, cost nearly 20 million lives (some 10 million of which were civilians). It was meant to be “the war to end all wars”, but it didn’t. For its sequel, the Second World War, deemed the deadliest military conflict to date, then cost an estimated 70 million lives (some 3% of the then global population) with 50 million of these as a direct result of the conflict, and 20 million dying from war-related disease and famine, not to mention the Holocaust and Hiroshima. And since 1945, there have been over 40 major conflicts across our globe, resulting in a further 40 million fatalities.

*All those victims of war, we will remember today.*

Many involved fought willingly for freedom and democratic values, against tyranny and oppression, so that “justice might roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever flowing stream” (to quote our OT lesson from Amos 5 v24). Many laid down their lives for that cause, making the “ultimate sacrifice” for that freedom, to die so that we might live in peace. “Greater love has no man than this...”

*All those who made that ultimate sacrifice, we will remember today.*

Many knew the cost they might have to pay. In the First World War, boys (for that’s what they still were) went straight from classroom to conflict, some to the most dangerous job in the world as junior officers on the Western Front. Well aware of how many of their predecessors, called to set the example and to be first over the top, had fallen before them, still they unflinchingly stepped forward to do what they saw as their duty. As a consequence, in the trenches the average life expectancy of a subaltern, a 2nd Lieutenant, (a rank I might probably myself have aspired to), was a mere 6 weeks.

One example amongst so many: Captain William Kenneth Seale Haslam from Breadsall, who served in the Royal Field Artillery in the First World War and was killed in action in France in 1917, aged 24. Over a century later, his name is still memorialised on the silver mace presented to us by his family as a thank-offering for his life, and carried in procession every Sunday by a verger in this place.

*Memorial* is the second of my 3 Words. All over our land this day, folk wear poppies as a symbol of remembrance and will stand at war memorials to remember those who, in the words of the Kohima epitaph, “for your tomorrow, gave our today”. Some memorials are in town and city squares, some in village churchyards; some will record only a handful of names, others many hundreds. At the Menin Gate in Ypres, a limestone arch 80ft high and 135ft long records the names of 55 thousand soldiers who died

defending 12 miles of the Ypres Salient, and have no known grave. At the National Arboretum at Alrewas, the walls of the Armed Forces Memorial record the names of the 16,000 British combatants who have been killed in conflict since World War Two, and sadly, blank space has been left for another 16,000 names to follow. At these memorials, folk will stand in silence, and then promise that “*we will remember them*”.

*Silence* is the third of my 3 Words: the two minutes silence of remembrance. And perhaps this silence is our only possible appropriate response to the enormity of the personal cost of war, our tribute to those who have passed into the Great Silence as a result of it, our awe of their sacrifice, and our commitment to maintain the costly peace for which they laid down their lives, as we pledge that “*we will remember them*”.

*Sacrifice, memorial, silence: 3 words for remembrance.*

But also on this Remembrance Sunday, and indeed on every Sunday, we remember:

Jesus, the Lamb of God, and his perfect *sacrifice* made once for the sins of the whole world;

Jesus, the Son of God, whose body was broken for us, and whose blood was shed for us, whose *memorial* of our redemption is this Eucharist in which we share;

Jesus, the Son of Man, who stood in *silence* before his accusers and executioners, yet assured us that he *will* come again.

“Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again.”

And *when* he comes again in glory, we are told we will hear of wars and rumours of wars, but not to be alarmed, for these are but the beginnings of the birth pangs of the New Age he has promised (Matt 24 v 6-8). But we are to be *ready*, for the Son of Man will come at an unexpected hour (Matt 24 v44).

So in the closing words of the apocalyptic parable which was our gospel reading today (Matt 25 v13):

“*Keep awake...for you know neither the day nor the hour*”.

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