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Micah 4.1–8, **Matthew 5:43–48** and **John 15:9–17**.

Every November we say the familiar words: **"We will remember them."**

And we should. But perhaps the question for us this morning is not simply *will* we remember, but **how! HOW shall we remember?**

Remembering is not a virtue in itself. Human beings are very good at remembering old injuries. Nations remember ancient grievances. Communities remember who did what to whom. Families can remember a hurt for generations. Memory can reconcile, but memory can also keep hatred alive. So, clearly, Christian remembrance needs to be something more. I want to suggest this morning that if our remembrance is to be Christian – and worthy of those whose lives were lost, we need to remember in three ways: **honestly, universally, and actively.**

Remembrance begins with honesty. We remember the courage and sacrifice of those who served. We remember young men and women who left ordinary lives — families, jobs, friendships, hopes for the future — and found themselves caught up in circumstances they could scarcely have ever imagined. In the hell of war ordinary men and women did, again and again, extraordinary acts of courage, of loyalty and of self-giving. Those things deserve to be remembered. But we do them no honour if we romanticise war itself.

War is not glorious simply because courage can be found within it. War is human beings killing other human beings. It is people like you and me killing people like you and me! It is shattered bodies and traumatised minds. It is parents receiving the message they have dreaded. It is children growing up without a father or mother. It is civilians discovering that the place they called home has gone.

After the guns fall silent, the consequences remain. That is why the poppy, at its best, is not a celebration of military victory. It is a sign of **cost**. One of the responsibilities of the Church on Remembrance Sunday is to resist the temptation to turn remembrance into nostalgia.

There was nothing nostalgic about the Somme or about Passchendaele. Nothing was nostalgic about Coventry or Dresden, Hiroshima or Nagasaki. From Ukraine to the Sudan there is nothing nostalgic about war for those experiencing it whilst you and I sit down to Sunday lunch. Remembrance asks us to look into the darkness of human history without turning our eyes away. That is why we should **remember honestly.**

But there is a second challenge. We must remember **universally**. When we stand at our war memorials, naturally we read the names of *our* dead. They belonged to our towns and villages. They walked our streets. They sat in our churches and schools and cafes. Their families lived where our families lived. Of course we remember them. But Christian remembrance cannot stop at the edge of nationality because the uncomfortable truth is that on the other side of every battlefield other mothers are grieving too. German mothers. French mothers. Russian mothers. Ukrainian mothers. Israeli mothers. Palestinian mothers and countless others of mothers. Their tears are not different to our tears.

One of the most radical teachings attributed to Jesus is: **"Love your enemies."** We have heard those words so often that perhaps we no longer notice how extraordinary they are. Jesus does not say, "Pretend you have no enemies." He does not say evil does not matter this time. He does not say injustice should simply be tolerated sometimes. He says that even the person whom we have learned to call *enemy* remains a human being.

That is profoundly difficult. It is also profoundly important because every war begins long before the shooting starts. It begins when another group of human beings becomes **"them."** When their suffering matters less than ours. When their children matter less than our children. When their deaths become statistics while ours have names and photographs.

The movement from neighbour to stranger, from stranger to enemy, and from enemy to something less than human is one of the oldest journeys humanity knows. Jesus invites us to travel in the opposite direction. That is why we should **remember universally.**

And that brings us to the third kind of remembrance. We must remember **actively**. There is a danger that Remembrance Sunday becomes something we *observe* rather than something we *do*. We gather. We lay wreaths. We stand collectively silent for two minutes. We say: **"We will remember them."** And then Monday morning is upon us!

But the prophet Micah gives us a very different image of remembrance. Micah dreams of a world in which swords become ploughshares and spears become pruning hooks. Notice something about that image. The swords do not simply disappear. **They are transformed.** Something designed to destroy life is beaten into something capable of sustaining life.

That is a wonderful image of what remembrance might mean. The question is not simply: **What happened then?** The question is: **What shall we now make of what happened then?** If we remember the dead but continue creating the conditions which produce more dead, then our remembrance is incomplete. If we remember the victims of hatred while leaving room for some hatred ourselves, our remembrance is incomplete. If we honour those who died in war but are indifferent to the work of peace, our remembrance is incomplete. For Christians (and devout communities everywhere), remembrance must contain within it a commitment to transformation.

Methodism has something particular to say here. John Wesley famously described the world as his parish. That Methodist instinct matters on Remembrance Sunday. Our compassion cannot stop at the boundary of nation, race, religion or tribe. Our tradition has always insisted that faith must become practical. Grace is not simply something to be believed. Alongside love it is something to be **lived**.

So peace-making is not an optional extra for particularly idealistic Christians. It belongs at the heart of the Gospel. And peace-making does not mean pretending that difficult choices disappear. There are situations where people must be protected. There are aggressors who must be resisted. There are injustices which cannot simply be negotiated away.

Christians will legitimately disagree about when military force may be necessary. But even when force is judged necessary, Christians should never become comfortable with it. There is a difference between saying: **"Sometimes war may be the least terrible choice available"** and saying: **"This time, war is good."** It never is. At best it is tragedy forced upon us by the failure of better possibilities.

That is why Micah's vision remains before us — not as a description of the world we inhabit, but as a judgement upon it and an invitation beyond it. **"Neither shall they learn war anymore."** That may be the most challenging line of all because war has to be *learned*. We *learn* whom to fear. We *learn* whom to distrust. We *learn* which lives matter more than others. We *learn* the stories which justify our side of the argument and condemns their side of it.

Peace has to be learned as well. We *learn* to listen. We *learn* to forgive. We *learn* to see another person's humanity... to question our own certainties... that reconciliation is not weakness. We *learn* that justice and peace belong together. And sometimes we *learn* the extraordinarily difficult truth that forgiveness does not change the past — but it can prevent the past from controlling the future.

So today we remember.

We remember those from our own communities who died.
We remember those who returned carrying wounds visible and invisible.
We remember civilians whose names never appear on memorials.
We remember conscientious objectors who believed that faithfulness required them to refuse to kill.
We remember military chaplains, medics, rescuers and peacekeepers.
We remember the enemy dead.
We remember all whose lives have been swallowed by humanity's repeated failure to live together.
We remember too the horses, the dogs, the wildlife. Countless numbers of them too were brutalised and killed.

We remember them all not in order to glorify the past, but to change the future. That is what those familiar words should mean when we say them today: **We will remember them.**

We will remember them **honestly** — refusing to make war desirable or inevitable.
We will remember them **universally** — refusing to believe that only our dead matter.
And we will remember them **actively** — refusing to accept that humanity must endlessly repeat the same story.

The finest memorial to those who died in war is not another monument. It is a generation determined to make war less likely. A community prepared to choose reconciliation over hatred. A Church willing to proclaim that no human being is beyond the boundaries of compassion. The finest memorial is a world which, albeit slowly and imperfectly, begins to turn swords into ploughshares. Until one day the prophet Micah's impossible dream becomes a little less impossible:

Nation shall not lift up sword against nation. Neither shall they learn war any more. And everyone shall sit beneath their own vine and their own fig tree, and no one shall make them afraid.

Amen.