

## SERMON REMEMBRANCE SUNDAY 2021

Nobody in their right mind wants war or conflict. But there is a malevolence within our human nature that can cause us to do the most dreadful and most inhumane things.

It is quite shocking what we are capable of. And the horrors of the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century with its two world wars: with the evil and horror of Nazism, with the inhumanity of the Japanese prisoner of war camps. with the equal horrors of the Communist Gulag labour camps under Joseph Stalin. The absolute human horrors of these situations are difficult for us to conceive of but we MUST.

For we ignore history at our peril.

And these things don't go away. The atrocities under the banner of the Islamist movements doesn't go away either. They simply fall out of the media gaze. And it is only because of the bravery and sacrifice of those who fought against such things, and continue to fight against such things, that we, the last 3 generations, have had our freedom. Let us not delude ourselves that freedom for all is something that naturally happens. It's a moral choice made by our society. And it needs constantly keeping track of.

In a stable social setting we can create order and structure and move towards healing and help for those unable to be socialised. But when whole societies break down more drastic action is necessary. Boundaries of order need to be re-established. And this is where the bravery and the courage of those in the armed forces comes in.

Hopefully we no longer engage in conflict with a misplaced sense of nationalism but with a recognition of the importance of those guiding principles which hold our humanity together.

Principles such as:

- Protecting the weak and vulnerable.
- Halting those who would do harm.
- Promoting individual freedoms, mutually respected.
- A valuing of each individual human life.
- And a promoting of the values that edify us as human beings

We are, however, currently in a dangerous moment in time because in our Western world we seem to be giving up on two foundational things which have kept our human society on course.

One of these is God and the other is Truth.

As human beings we DO have God-given rights. We are all made in the image of God. Though if you don't acknowledge God then it makes things a bit more difficult.

Two main God-Given rights are Freedom and Equality.

Our God given human freedom, and our equality in the eyes of God, are not things which are gifted to us by society or culture. If it is our leaders or our society which gives us these rights then our leaders can quite as easily take them away. But those who govern us do not make us free.

We are born free.

Our leaders in the past and in the present did not make us equal. We are created equal. It is from these things that the Law was formulated that All are Equal under the Law. It is a theological Truth reflected in our civil law. These are things that are God given and if those with the power to govern try to take these things away from us we need to shout loud and clear that these are not for negotiation or re-interpretation these are our spiritual birthright. These things were fought for last century for us. And they are the only things worth fighting for today.

Currently with our identity politics we are in grave danger of falling into tribalism, which creates a sense of us and them within our society. This is the worst kind of ideology however well-intentioned. It leads to discrimination and conflict and inhuman anger and aggression. It opens up an arena in which human malevolence can grow and manifest in frightening ways. Freedom to be and freedom to speak one's truth are fundamental to a tolerant society.

The early 20<sup>th</sup> century was a warning of how quickly things can unravel when people feel lost and unfulfilled. And today, not only are we loosing sight of God and our over-arching meta-narrative or greater story that helps us make sense of our human freedoms, But we are loosing sight of Truth and replacing it with strongly held opinion. In the Twitter sphere everyone has an opinion But having a strong, uninformed opinion that is said loudly and aggressively to make your point, doesn't make it true.

So what is the antidote to all this separation and splintering?

What many of us have come to recognise over the lockdowns we have had is just how important other people are. We are naturally social and need each others company. Love and care for each other is the fragrance of all that is good in the world. When it is purged from a society by anger and blame we know that something has gone badly wrong. When it is missing so spectacularly it is time for us to really worry about our humanity.

For without love we are nothing.

There is a middle ground that needs filling, with people who have a vision for nurturing all that is True and Good. A middle ground filled with Mature Wisdom and Understanding Responsibility and Mercy Love and Beauty. The principles of shared liberty in community and personal, noble sacrifice for the greater good, need once more to become the focus of our life journeys. We owe that to our ancestors who came before and our children who are to come. That the tremendous sacrifices of those in our armed forces today, and the sacrifice of our grandparents and great-great grandparents May not be in vain. Amen.