

In Remembrance of Me
Churchill 8/11/2009 @ 10:45 a.m.
Readings: Deuteronomy 8v1-14; 1 Corinthians 11:17-26

Introduction

The problem most of us have with Remembrance Day is that we have no-one to remember.

The last first world war veterans in the UK died this year.

The last second world war combat death was 64 years ago.

Few of us here knew any of those names we read out.

We're just too young.

How can you remember someone you've never known?

Yet, though logically it ought to be dying out, Remembrance Day is getting bigger every year.

Because, over the past few years, there have once again been people in the UK who have everything to remember.

179 British servicemen died in Iraq, the last in February.

230 have died in Afghanistan, 7 this past week alone.

Here in our villages we have real examples of those risking their lives in these war zones.

We have thanked God that the Stockwell's son-in-law Alastair has safely returned from 6 months in Kabul.

And we're praying a lot for Chris Chapman, a church member, who is working with the RAF in Hellmand.

And for his wife Jess too.

Well, you do, don't you, for people you know?

Personal relationships and experiences help us to relate to the suffering of others.

In the New Testament, the apostle Paul says this is so: 'Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort...'

Isn't that a fantastic way to talk about the Lord!

'the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort'.

Do you know God personally, yourself, as your Father of compassion and your God of all comfort?

Because the second half of the verse only works, of course, for those who do know him like that.

So Paul continues, '...the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.' 2 Corinthians 1:3f

So whenever you go through a tough time and turn to the Lord for help and comfort in it – and not all of us here will do that because not all of us here know him like that – then down the line you'll be able to comfort someone else.

Isn't that great!

And you don't need to have experienced exactly the same thing in order to comfort someone else.

Just the experience of suffering and of turning to the Lord and finding him faithful in comforting you, will be a very real help to someone else.

But back to today, what is the point of remembering those who have died in war?

Well, for those who have known and loved them, it's clear.

It means remembering all that they were and meant to you, holding them in your hearts 'til the day you die.

Fine, but for the rest of us?

What are we remembering today if we never knew anyone who died in war?

The answer isn't so much remembering them, because we never knew them, but what they did.

And not just what they did, but how much worse our lives would have been if they hadn't died.

Imagine for a moment the terror of living here if Hitler had won the second world war.

Some of us know people who lived, even just for a comparatively short time, under the terror of Nazi rule.

Remember, then imagine the alternative, and then give thanks to God that you never had to face that!

Oz Schmid died for others

So, imagining what your life might have been like if they hadn't given their lives, helps to make personal sense of what we're doing here today.

But it can also be helpful thinking about a real life example of what it means to give your life for others.

Did you hear about Staff Sgt Oz Schmid?

Oz was a brilliant army bomb disposal expert, based in Didcot, who had been working in Helmand province in Afghanistan for just over 5 months when, last Saturday, he was killed by a bomb he was trying to defuse.

This weekend he should have been home for a fortnight's leave with his wife and 5 year old son!

Like me, you may have wondered why he risked his life defusing roadside bombs in the middle of nowhere.

Why not just explode them from a safe distance?

Well, the answer is that they need to study the bombs in great detail in order to find, and then defuse, the next bomb, which may not be in the middle of nowhere.

As well as find and capture the bomb maker.

Because the bomb makers are constantly changing their techniques and designs.

But for me, that makes Oz's bravery all the more amazing.

And make no mistake, this was one seriously brave man!

His commanding office said this week ‘Staff Sgt Oz Schmid was simply the bravest and most courageous man I have ever met. No matter how difficult or lethal the task which lay in front of us, he was the man who only saw solutions. He saved lives ... time after time and for that he will retain a very special place in every heart of every rifleman in our extraordinary battle group.’

Another of his commanders said: ‘Many soldiers and ordinary Afghans owe their lives to Staff Sgt Schmid's gallant actions and his sacrifice will never be forgotten.’

See, they will most certainly remember him!

Well, you would, wouldn't you, if your life was one of the ones he saved?

He didn't just throw himself on a bomb about to detonate in order to save crowds, in a shopping centre, say.

Somehow that spur-of-the-moment bravery makes sense.

In my better moments, I'd like to think I might do that.

No, he saved people in the future.

People who weren't at any risk at the time, not knowing how many, who, when or even where.

Every day for the past 5 months, that man was willing to lose his life in order to save many others in the future.

And in those 5 months he defused 64 Taliban bombs, aimed at both soldiers & civilians, Afghans & foreigners.

His poor wife is distraught, yet she was able to say ‘I take comfort knowing he saved countless lives with his hard work.’

Jesus died for others

Next Sunday, here at the same time, we'll be holding another remembrance service.

But we won't use flags and poppies to help us remember.

We'll use bread and wine.

And we won't be remembering lots of ordinary men and women who gave their lives serving our country.

We'll remember just the unique God-man, Jesus Christ.

And we won't be struggling to work out how his death affects you and me.

Because we will recall Jesus' shocking words: ‘God so loved the world [not just one Battle Group, or even one country] that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.’ John 3:16

Every person saved by Oz Schmid will be grateful to him as long as they live and will always remember him.

But every single one of them will die one day in the future, sooner or later, for one reason or another.

But everyone who Jesus died for ‘shall not perish but have eternal life.’

That means live forever; never stop living. Ever!

We won't actually call it a remembrance service, though that's what it is.

We'll call it a communion service, or the Lord's Supper.

And what we'll do, and why we'll do it, was set out in our second reading from the Bible.

From Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, chapter 11.

So let's just take a few minutes to remember that Jesus died in our place.

Then imagine what life would be like if he hadn't died.

And give thanks to God for all that life is and can be for each one of us because he died in our place.

Finally, if you're not yet a Christian, or aren't sure, I'll tell you how you can receive all that Jesus died to bring you.

Remember that Jesus died in our place

So first of all, remember that Jesus did actually die in your and in my place.

This is a fact of history, and Paul tells us, in v23 of our reading, what Jesus did the night before he was executed:

‘The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, “This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.”

So, Paul concludes ‘For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.’

We remember and we proclaim whenever we have a communion service.

That's what we'll do here next week, I hope you'll come.

We'll remember that actual day in that actual upstairs room in that actual city of Jerusalem in April 33 A.D.

And we'll remember how Jesus was betrayed by a close friend, led through three fixed trials, and then nailed to a wooden cross until he died.

And Jesus said, a few hours before he was betrayed, that it was all ‘for you’.

Have you realised that it was all ‘for you’?

That if you had been the only person alive, he would still have done it, just for you?

When the apostle Paul realised that Jesus had died for him, in his place, taking the punishment he was due for all his sins, he was completely blown away.

He had never known such love towards him!

His life was utterly turned around and transformed.

That's what such love can do to you!

And later, in Romans chapter 5, he wrote this: ‘at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.’ V6ff

Look, I'm in love with my wife, Linnie!

If you're in love, you'll look for and enjoy all the little ways that the other person demonstrates how much they love you, won't you?

Well, 'God demonstrates his own love for you and for me in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.'

Did you know you were loved that much by God?

Back to Jesus' last night before he died, and he also said these words to his disciples:

'Greater love has no-one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.' John 15:13

So remember, even if it is the first time you've realised what God did to demonstrate his love for you, remember that Jesus died for you.

What would life be like if he hadn't died in our place?

So secondly, what would life be like if Jesus hadn't died.

Or, if you're not yet a Christian, think for a moment what it means to refuse to let Jesus die in your place.

Remember what he said: 'God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.'

So if I refuse to believe in him, I will perish and will not have eternal life.

If you're not yet a Christian today, or you're not sure, let me ask you, why ever would you want that?

Why ever would you want to come before God when you die, unforgiven.

When he has demonstrated how much he loves you and wants you in relationship with him?

Why ever would you want to face God's punishment for all you've done, thought and said that was wrong?

Jesus made it clear that would be an awful thing to face.

So unless you're absolutely sure that you are and have always been perfect in God's eyes, just don't go there!

Give thanks to God for all that life is and can be for each one of us because he died in our place.

Remember that Jesus died on that cross for you, and imagine what you would have had to face if you hadn't accepted his offer to take your place.

If you haven't yet done that, do it today, before it's too late.

And then thirdly, thank him from the bottom of your heart for his promise to die in your place, so that you won't perish but will have eternal life.

And there's so much more; there's what Jesus called 'life in all its fulness'!

Eternal life, as Jesus defined it, isn't just about living forever is all about having a personal relationship with God and the Lord Jesus himself.

And all that flows from that was part of God's original plan, ages and ages before Jesus was even born.

Let me just give you the briefest taster of what God promised he'd do for all who believed and trusted in Jesus.

For the keenies among you it is in Jeremiah chapter 31.

He promised to make a new covenant or agreement.

That's what Jesus referred to the night before he died.

Remember what he said - "This cup is the new covenant in my blood..."

Listen for the four precious promises in this new covenant that came when Jesus' blood was spilt for us.

Because all four are yours if you're a Christian and all four can be yours today if you're not yet a Christian.

'this is the covenant that I will make...: [first promise] I will put my law within them, and I'll write it on their hearts. [Second promise] I will be their God, and they shall be my people. [Third promise] ... they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest... [Fourth promise] I will forgive their wrongdoing, and will remember their sin no more.' Jeremiah 31v33f

Did you spot those amazing four promises?

First promise: to change you from the inside out, change your heart, your desires, hopes and aspirations, and make them more like his own.

So that your heart will increasingly beat as one with his.

Second promise: He'll be our God and we'll be his people.

Elsewhere he calls his people 'the apple of my eye'.

And Jesus promised this for all who believe in him: 'I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no-one can snatch them out of my hand.' John 10:28f

Third promise: each person who puts their faith in Jesus will know God personally.

Not corporately, not through some kind of priest, not fuzzily; but personally and really.

Fourth promise: God will forgive each person.

In fact more than that, he promises that he will 'remember their sins no more'.

Do you see how we've come full circle?

Today is all about remembering.

But as I remember that Jesus died in my place, God promises he will not remember my sins.

How can I receive all that Jesus died to bring me?

I said I'd close by telling how you can receive those promises from God, or be sure that you have, and so I will.

This is how. Ask him! That's it!

So I'm going to lead us in a brief prayer now as we sit.

If you're already a Christian, then I suggest that you simply repeat the prayer quietly in your own mind.

If you would like to ask God's forgiveness and for the gift of eternal life for the first time, then do the same.

Let's pray together. I'll pause after each sentence.

Prayer (do business)

Father God, thank you for all those who have died in the service of our country. Thank you even more for sending your only son Jesus to die on the cross in my place. I'm sorry that I made his death necessary. Please give me the gift of eternal life and the four promises you made in the Bible. And for my part, I commit to do all I can to follow the Lord Jesus as long as I live. Amen.

There are a number of people here today who have become Christians very recently. If you have prayed that prayer for the first time today, would you do one thing. After the memorial at the end of this service, tell either Steve or me. We would love to know and help you get started on this wonderful new life you've begun.