

Romans 8 – Remembrance Sunday 10.11.2019

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Good morning and may I start by saying what a privilege it is to be a part of this Remembrance Service. As we come here to remember those who made the ultimate sacrifice; of laying down their lives so that others may go free.

I stand here, on familiar ground and not because I'm a clergyman. But because remembering those who have died in conflict has sadly been a part of my life, my own personal experience.

Having served in the British Army as an Officer in the Royal Engineers for 11 years, which included two tours of Afghanistan, I too have had to deal with the loss of friends and colleagues that I have served with.

Remembering the lost and the fallen is painful but vital, it is a promise that all Officers and Soldiers make when they say 'we will remember them!'

The soldiers I have known and served with, have fought with loyalty for their regiment. Also, way beyond any political motivation, they fought for those who stood firm, by their side.

So today we remember these brave men and women who left behind friends and family. Real people, real lives, loved and known, yet never forgotten.

And as we remember those who laid down their lives, in lands very far from home, we may ask: where is the justice and hope for all who died in such brutal circumstances?

And I believe that the reading, read to us from Paul's letter to the Romans; speaks right into the very heart of this question.

We live in a period of time, in a country where many of us live the most materially privileged lives ever known in the history of the world. But I believe that one of the great tragedies of our contemporary culture is that it deprives us of hope.

It tells us that there is no meaning beyond this life.

It also tells us that Christianity seeks to deprive us of our freedom as modern western individuals.

Well this morning, as we remember those who laid down their lives on our behalf. I want to tell you about the freedom and the hope that I have discovered through trusting in the person of Jesus Christ.

Trusting that he is, who he says he is. Trusting in the considerable evidence for his life, death and resurrection rather than trusting that all of this came from nothing.

If God exists and created this universe, then why couldn't he come as a man? Why wouldn't he die on the cross in our place? Surely it is inevitable that if he was God he would rise from the dead?

The hope of the resurrection is what I have clung to as I have witnessed death and suffering. The hope that God has a glorious purpose, for all who follow him. A purpose that turns grief into hope and transforms distant memory into a concrete future.

The hope of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, points to a greater future for all who trust in him. He died on the cross for the sins of the world and he rose again, to demonstrate his power over death and to show what our future can look like too.

Over the years, many soldiers who have witnessed the unspeakable horrors of war, have rejected belief in God. They ask: 'How could this of happened?'

But there are many soldiers, including myself, who have clung to the hope of the resurrection. We have believed that there is a better story, a greater hope and a brighter future for those who trust in Jesus Christ.

That there is hope beyond the grave!! That lives taken too soon, in unimaginably horrific circumstances, will be restored by the power of a loving God.

I have witnessed soldiers come to faith in Afghanistan, having seen their friends killed or wounded. It transformed their perspective, their faith brought them hope in the midst of suffering.

And for 2000 years men and women have trusted in this hope. And indeed, the whole of the Christian faith hangs on the thread of the resurrection of Jesus Christ; break this thread and there is nothing to trust in. And throughout history, Academics, scholars, politicians and rulers have all sought to cut this thread, but it is a thread made of titanium.

And it cannot be broken, for it is of God!

For as the Apostle Paul writes:

35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?

37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

38 For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons,^[k] neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹ neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Today, as I stand here in my new role, as a clergyman. I also stand here as a former soldier. I stand here as someone who has seen young men die too soon, soldiers with life changing injuries. I have seen colleagues who have returned from war having lost brothers in arms and have suffered severe mental anguish as a consequence.

What do I want to say to these people?

God loves you. He has a purpose for you. The men and the women who we remember today have been entrusted into the merciful arms of the God who came to earth in the person of Jesus Christ and defeated death.

There is more evidence for this than many of us realise. We can have genuine hope for those who have gone before us and called on the name of Jesus.

So when we stand in silence to remember those who have gone before us, I will do so with great sadness as I remember the lives that were not lived. But I will also cling to the hope of Jesus Christ. I will trust that he has defeated death. I will cling to the hope that surpasses all.