

A Sermon for Remembrance Day 2013

What do you do with your poppy after Remembrance Day? Do you throw it away? Or keep it for next year? Does it languish in a drawer until you come across it in a few months time? Perhaps you have a very particular place for it? It's something I've never really thought about until I was reading in the paper about Martin Waters' installation "Trench".

If you haven't seen it "Trench" is in our north transept, over my right shoulder, it is made up of 10,000 poppies, poppies donated mainly by the people of East Yorkshire. In all Mr Waters has had around 30,000 poppies donated to him which has allowed him to create this and other thought-provoking installations in the region.

But the Poppy is a symbol of our remembering. So I want to ask of us the bigger question – what will you, what will I, do with our remembering after Remembrance Day? Today there are many acts of remembrance, tomorrow, on the actual 11th of November, there will be more. What happens on Tuesday, and the next day and the next? Will we put our remembering away until next year - when we will get it out again and brush it off.

For some of us here that isn't what will happen because for some of us the remembering is more personal, because with it is mourning – mourning what has happened to a colleague, a friend, a partner, a parent, a child. That isn't something you can switch in and out of in line with the calendar. But for many of us we are at more of a distance sharing in solidarity in that remembering – and while it is not as personal for us, it matters.

How we remember and what we do with our remembering, matters.
What we do on Tuesday, matters

Because if we just put our remembering, along with our poppies to one side, then we have not remembered rightly this weekend.

Right remembering is about more than setting aside a day in a year to remind ourselves of the facts. Remembering rightly is about how we live in the light of those facts. Especially today as a community, as a nation.

In the Old Testament the people of God, the Israelites, were forever being called by God to remember – to remember who they were, where they had come from – and it was usually at times in their life when things were going wrong. But that call to remember wasn't about just reminding themselves how they had got into their current mess, it was also a call, more than that, a promise to a future that would be different.

We heard it in that first reading – written against a background of war and occupation by a foreign power – words, a promise of a different future.

And God's promise for a different future is for all nations, not just one.

God asks his people to remember. And right remembering, honourable remembering, requires both honesty and vision from us.

Honesty about our past – today we must remind ourselves of the facts of wars and conflicts, past and present, and remember – with sorrow, pride, gratitude, wonder.

One of the bits of background that I did as I reflected on all this was to find information about the number of British forces casualties in Afghanistan.

As part of their news site The Guardian have a page called Datablog – it's a place where they put analysis of all sorts of different reports as they come out – there's lots of facts and figures there – I found a complete month by month breakdown of British casualties in Afghanistan since the beginning of our time there – and the strapline to Datablog is "facts are sacred".

Something that is sacred is to be held with respect and honour before God.

And that is what we do today, because behind each fact is a person and behind them, a family, colleagues, a group of friends, a community, a nation that is different because of that one.

But today God would also say to us – as you remember don't forget your future, don't get stuck with the facts, however sacred, in a way that causes you to forget you have a future.

For right remembering, honourable remembering we must have a vision for the future.

God's ultimate promise for us is that God will dwell with us, there will be no more mourning, no more crying, no more pain – we will get out of our cycles of violence and war because all of that has been gathering up in Christ who has shown us a different way.

And that future starts with us, now, because there is no going back, only moving forward. Taking our remembering and our honouring with us, and living in the light of it, not putting it to one side.

So how will we remember honourably? In the light of our remembering today and tomorrow, how will you, and will we, resolve in our lives to be on Tuesday?

When you remove your poppy from the coat it's been on these last few days think about what you will do with it, and what will you do with the remembering that it symbolises – perhaps you will add it to "Trench" – join your remembering with others. Perhaps you will put it in a particular place from where it'll continue to nudge you in your remembering.

But let it be a symbol of the vision God calls us to take up in our future – individually, as a community, as a nation – that by our living, We will remember them.