Remembrance Sunday: Peace

In the Bible verse we're looking at this morning, Jesus is speaking to his disciples on the eve of his arrest and crucifixion, and he says this: **'Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.'** (John 14:27)

Those words are immediately appealing. From the cliché of the Miss World contestant who says that her greatest desire is for world peace to the US President who is desperate to get his hands on the Nobel Peace Prize, we all want peace. Of course, there are different kinds of peace. Think of the exhausted mum, whose looking forward to having the kids tucked up in bed and the chance for some peace and quiet. There's the inner peace we might crave when we're anxious about something. And there's the absence of conflict that we might long for, whether between neighbours or family members, or at work, or between nations. Whatever kind of peace we're talking about, we all want it. We all want peace.

Today, Remembrance Sunday, we remember the sacrifice of those who have given their lives in pursuit of peace. We owe them a huge debt of gratitude. And it's right that we remember them. But our experience, all too often, is that peace is evasive. It's estimated that almost ten million soldiers died during the First World War. About the same number of civilians are believed to have died. It was claimed to be the war that would end all wars. But of course, that wasn't the case. In 1938, Neville Chamberlain returned from Munich famously stating that an agreement had been reached with Adolf Hitler's Germany, that would secure 'Peace for our time'. Less than a year later, World War Two began. Between twenty and twenty-five million military fatalities are recorded. And twice as many civilian fatalities. And, of course, war still continues today. In Iran. In Ukraine. In Gaza. In Sudan. And in many other places around the world. And that's not to mention trade wars, acts of sabotage and terrorism.

We long for peace, yet so often, when we think we've found it, it proves to be fragile. Conflict always seems to be lurking close beneath the surface. Neighbourly harmony so quickly descends into neighbourly disputes. Friendships descend into squabbling. Close family bonds descend into family feuds. Despite our longings for peace, conflict is never far away. It seems that it's part of our DNA. And it always has been. Cast your mind back to school, and you'll probably remember that to study history is to study a long list of wars. The site of one of them is just down the road: the Battle of Hastings. In the history of our own country, there's the Wars of the Roses, the English Civil War, the Napoleonic Wars, and so on. Whatever period of history we might turn to, whether its modern history or ancient history, we find that it's defined by war. And to understand why, the Bible tells us that we need to go back further in time than the events we have recorded in our history books. We need to go back to the very beginning.

The Bible begins with the story of the Garden of Eden. It describes a beautiful garden, filled with all kinds of trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. There was fruit

everywhere. And God told Adam and Eve to help themselves. They could eat whatever they wanted. It was paradise.

You might be familiar with Roald Dahl's book *Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory.* It tells the story of five lucky children who find five golden tickets: Augustus Gloop, Violet Beauregarde, Veruca Salt, Mike Teevee and, of course, Charlie Bucket. These tickets allow them to tour Willy Wonka's top-secret chocolate factory. Once inside, they enter the Chocolate Room; the nerve centre of the whole operation. It contains a massive, edible valley. The grass is made of sugar. Toadstools are made of candy. There are gummy bear bushes and jellybean trees. A chocolate river flows through the middle and turns into a cascading waterfall of chocolate. It's a child's version of paradise. We can imagine the amazement on their faces when the children first saw it. And the Garden of Eden was no less wonderful. Everywhere Adam and Eve looked there were trees full of sweet, juicy fruit. They could eat whatever they wanted. All they had to do was reach out their hands and take it. Through the middle flowed a river of cool, refreshing water to quench their thirst. The abundance of the garden bore testimony to the goodness and generosity of God. It was paradise. There was only one tree that was off limits; only one command to obey.

But the story of the Garden of Eden teaches us that from the very beginning humankind has set itself in opposition to God. When faced with the choice between obeying God or doing as they pleased, Adam and Eve chose disobedience and autonomy. When they picked the fruit from the one tree that God had said was off limits, they declared warfare with God. As a result, they were expelled from the garden. And since then, each of us has followed in their footsteps. By nature, we all live as enemies of God, taking his goodness for granted, asserting our independence, and demanding our autonomy. It's what the Bible calls sin. And it's the root cause of every conflict between us. Every conflict we live with today is a symptom of this deeper, more fundamental conflict that began when Adam and Eve rebelled against God. We will never have peace with one another without first having peace with God. We need to be reconciled to God before we can live in harmony with one another.

But that's why Jesus came. Remember his words: **'Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.'**

The world is powerless to give us true and lasting peace. At best, all it can give us is a temporary, fragile reprieve from the hostilities between us. It's what the American President, Thomas Jefferson, was acknowledging when he said that 'Peace is that brief glorious moment in history when everybody stands around reloading.'

The peace Jesus gives is a different kind of peace. It's the peace that he secured through his death on a cross. So, today, as we remember the sacrifice of those who have given their lives in the pursuit of peace, it's only right that we remember the sacrifice that *Jesus* made, at the cross, for us. His sacrifice was a necessary sacrifice. The Bible says that our rebellion brings us under God's judgement. A just and holy God cannot simply turn a blind eye to sin as though it doesn't matter. And we wouldn't want him to. We hate to see acts of injustice

going unpunished. We demand that justice is done. A just and holy God must punish sin, otherwise he would cease to be just. And the Bible says that the penalty for sin is death; not merely physical death but spiritual death, eternal death. It's the penalty we all deserve.

But in his great love and mercy, God the Father sent his one and only Son to pay the penalty for us. In Christ, God came among us as a man. He lived a sinless life; a life of infinite worth. And he willingly laid it down to pay the penalty for all who belong to him. He died in our place to take the punishment we deserve, so that we might be forgiven and reconciled to our heavenly Father. And then, on the third day, he rose again to show that his sacrifice had worked. The way to life with God had been thrown wide open.

Pop-ups on social media keep reminding me that Black Friday is approaching. You may have seen pictures in the past of crowds of people queueing outside big stores, waiting to be let in. Some have been there all night. Then eventually the time comes. The doors are flung open. And the crowds rush in, pushing and jostling, to get to the treasures they hope to find inside. The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the grave declares that the time has come; the way into God's presence is now open. The invitation is to come to God the Father through faith in Jesus his Son and to discover the treasures that he freely gives to all who do. Forgiveness for our sins. Reconciliation with the God who made us. Adoption into his family. His loving presence with us by his Spirit. His word to teach us. His wisdom to guide us. His daily provision for us. And a certain future ahead of us, in a new heaven and a new earth, where life will finally be all that it should be. In the Bible, God promises that one day, when Jesus returns, we will be with him forever. And we will enjoy, in eternity, all the blessings and more that were lost when Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden of Eden.

The good news of the Christian faith is that enemies of God can become his friends, through faith in Jesus. We can have peace with God and be welcomed into his family as his dearly loved children. This is the peace that Jesus gives us, when we come to him by faith. It's peace that the world cannot give. It's the peace that we all crave. There's nothing fragile or temporary about it. It's a permanent peace that will last into eternity.

To know this peace is to be freed from our fear of death and judgement, because we know that the penalty for our sin has been paid. It's to be freed from anxiety about the future, because we know that heaven awaits us. It's to have an inner peace that transcends our troubles, because we know that God is with us. It's to be assured of our value and worth, because we know that God's love rests up on us. It transforms how we see ourselves, because we know ourselves to be God's children. And as we experience this peace ourselves, it transforms our relationships with others as we seek to extend his peace to them too. This is the peace that Jesus offers to all who come to him by faith.

How will you respond to the sacrifice of Jesus?

It may be that you've been coming along to Emmanuel for a little while now, and you're ready to accept his invitation to come to the Father through him. In that case, I'm going to say a prayer in a moment, accepting his invitation. You can make that prayer your own by

saying 'Amen' at the end. If you pray that prayer for the first time, then please do tell someone that you've done that before you leave.

It may be that you want more time to think about the things you've heard today. There are lots of ways we can help you do that. Please do speak with me after the service and I would love to talk with you. Or it may be that you just want more time on your own to reflect on these things. That's fine. But please don't dismiss the sacrifice of Jesus and the invitation he extends. The peace he offers can be found nowhere else but in him.

So, here's a prayer that you can pray if you want to accept the invitation of Jesus to come to the Father through him. If you would like to, please make it your own by saying 'Amen' at the end.

Dear God in heaven, I recognise that I have been living as your enemy and I am sorry. I believe that Jesus died on a cross so that I can be forgiven and reconciled to you. Please forgive me and make me a child in your family. Please give me your peace. And please teach me a new way to live with you as my God and Saviour. I ask it through faith in Jesus. Amen.