

Thou tellest my wanderings: put thou my tears into thy bottle: are they not in thy book? When I cry unto thee, then shall mine enemies turn back: this I know; for God is for me. *Psalm 56.8-9.*

This is an extraordinary moment. This Remembrance Sunday is also Armistice Day, the 11th of November when exactly 100 years ago today the guns fell silent after four terrible years of slaughter. We are now in that first hour of peace, exactly 100 years on. Every person a century was affected by this. It saddens me that despite all the promotion in the media, only a minority today will actually come to a church or be present at a war memorial. Most people today will merely notice this as a news item on TV.

1914-1918 was the Great War in every respect. The American Civil war was truly dreadful and the first really industrial war, but 1914-1918 was a world war which involved everyone everywhere, military and civilian. There were 11m military and 8m civilian deaths, and dreadful as those figures are, they were nothing compared to the number of people who died as a result of the Spanish flu pandemic unleashed by the massive movement of troops around the world: estimates are between 50 and 100m worldwide. I haven't mentioned the millions of wounded, bereaved and the political upheavals with which we still live today. Indian troops fought in Flanders. Indeed, the soldier who fired the very first British shot was L/Cpl Alhaji Grunshi of the Gold Coast Regiment. Three days after Britain declared war on Germany on 4 August, 1914, L/Cpl Grunshi fired his shot at a squadron of German-led police in neighbouring Togo. This catastrophe was a truly world war.

And it is the sacrifice of these people that we remember today. We wear our poppy today with pride and thanks. All we do today is remember. But I do wish that people would not go beyond that. There is no need for

posturing. If people want to wear a white poppy, good luck to them, but please don't tell us who wear a red poppy that we somehow glorify war. No-one glorifies war. In my experience old soldiers are the first to condemn war. They have seen it. Remembrance is not about glorifying war. It is not about militarism. It is not about nationalism. It is just quiet remembering together. All the red poppy represents is the poppy fields of Flanders. What is warlike about that? And clergymen who refuse to hold remembrance services are denying people the chance to remember publicly and together the dead.

And this is what I want us to think about today. We stand now 100 years later in the very first hour of peace. Yes, it was over, but what to do next? How were people to rebuild their lives and come to terms with their loss? Much research has gone into how in the years following the Armistice communities came to memorialise those who fell in the Great War. Cenotaphs and war memorial were built. The Commonwealth War Graves Commission began its work. Churches put up plaques to members of their congregations who had died. And so it went on. The difficult decision was taken not to bring back the bodies of the fallen to Britain. Eventually parents and widows were able to cross the Channel to see the grave of their loved one. But what about those countless soldiers who were never found? A staggering 72,396 soldiers killed at the Somme were never found. This centenary year 72,396 little figurines have been laid out at the Somme. Their names came to be inscribed on the Thiepval Memorial. Mothers would now see their son's name and rub their finger in the letters. It was some comfort that their son, their husband or brother or sweetheart was not forgotten. Very few of us want to be famous. We don't want a fuss. We just want to be acknowledged. And that is what the

Commonwealth War Graves Commission and all those local committees sought to do after the War. The names are all listed on the War Memorial in Harrogate. Names are listed here in St Paul's and in countless villages up and down the country. It was Rudyard Kipling, grieving for his own son, John, who came up with the moving words, 'Known unto God' for all those bodies which could not be identified. What an inspired and comforting phrase!

Today we remember our dead. We are not here to talk about the rights and wrongs of the Great War, or the Second World War, or Iraq or Afghanistan, or even the rights and wrongs of war in general. We are here simply to remember the dead. We need to honour our dead.

But I would like to take this idea of remembering a little further. Let's go back to our text from *Psalms* 56.8. David was really up against it here with the Philistines. But he trusted God. He knew, as we read in v9, that 'God was for him'. That simple phrase must be one of the deepest thoughts in the Bible. Do you live your life knowing that, in good times and in bad, God is 'for you'? If you really believed that God is *with* you, and that he is *for* you, on your side, you would be able to face anything. But look now at v8: 'put my tears into thy bottle'. Isn't that an amazing image? God not only knows you as an individual. He not only knows your name, but he sees every single tear that you shed. And even more than that, he collects every one of your tears and keeps them in a bottle. Did you realise that God loves you and cares for you that much? Did you know, until you read that scripture, that God's care for you is that minute? This is not an indifferent universe. You count to God. Amazing!

So on this day when we do the remembering, I want you to realise that God remembers *you*. He remembers our sorrow and tears. Why? because he

is *for* you. He loves us so much that he came in Jesus. And Jesus loved us so much that he died on Calvary's Cross to free us from sin and give us new life.

God collects all your tears in a bottle. He knows exactly what you are going through right now. Your pains and sorrows are not nothing. God acknowledges them. And he in Christ also was killed unjustly and horribly. He entered into our pain and rose triumphantly above it at Easter.

After the Great War many people lost their faith. How could a good and powerful God allow such a senseless slaughter to happen? Why did he not intervene to stop it all? You can understand where people were coming from, but they were drawing the wrong conclusion. The horror of the trenches did not prove that God did not exist. It proved what the Bible has always said, that man is very, very sinful and totally depraved. God never told us to kill each other. 'Thou shalt not kill,' reads his 6th Commandment. And people should not have killed his Son at Calvary, but they did. God in Christ has been where we are. He has entered into our sorrow and he collects your tears in a bottle.

Everything you are going through is recorded. God sees it and records it all in the book, for one day he will put it all right. Justice will be done. No suffering is wasted. Your tears are not futile. God collects them in a bottle. *Malachi* 3.16 tells us that 'a scroll of remembrance was written in [God's] presence concerning those who feared the Lord and honoured his name'.

We remember the fallen today. But the truly good news is that *God* remembers them, and their sorrowing loved ones, and us, for he is 'for us'. He collects our tears in a bottle, and the day is coming when Christ will return to establish the new heaven and the new earth, and then he will wipe away all tears from our eyes, for there will be no more death, mourning, pain or death.