

Sermons at the All Saints Anglican Church of Luxembourg

Preached by Rev Alison Heal on Remembrance Sunday, 9th November 2025

Bible passages: Job 19:23-27a and 2 Thessalonians 2:1-5, 13-end

When I was a child, the most important thing about Remembrance Sunday seemed to be making sure I got a really nice poppy with an oak leaf.

When I was a teenager, my mother had to remind me that my grandparents had lost friends and comrades, so the Remembrance Sunday service had meaning for them, even if it didn't for me.

When I was a young adult, it seemed fairly obvious to me that Remembrance Sunday would fade from public observance, as my grandparents' generation died out.

And yet, several decades later, here we gather today, making a lie of all the things my younger self thought she understood about Remembrance Sunday.

I thought it was about paper poppies, and not about the veterans who'd made them or were supported through their sale.

Then I thought it was about glorifying a war that seemed a distant memory.

And then I thought we were living in a time of peace, with no losses to modern British Armed Forces, partly because my own father was in the Royal Navy and had mostly been engaged in the Cold War.

It is helpful to me to look back on those ways I understood Remembrance Sunday in the past, because I can set them in contrast to the different experiences we bring here today, a closer or further distance from the things of war, the sacrifice of lives, and the fear and tragedy of loss.

Back at those earlier stages of my life, I don't suppose these Bible readings we've just heard would have meant much to me. The first, from the book of Job, is the astounding justification of a suffering man. Job was a man who had lost almost everything in the world except his own life – he had lost family to violence; he'd lost his wealth and his health. His so-called friends came to comfort him, and after days of comforting silence, they took the bad decision to begin speaking. After Job has listened to their attempts to rationalise his suffering (basically, they say, it's all his fault), Job comes out with this extraordinary assertion: everything in my life has gone, I myself will die, but somehow there is a Redeemer, someone who will set this right. My flesh will rot he says, but somehow in his body he will see God. And Job insists, God will not be against him at that point, God will be there at his side, his Redeemer!

The second reading comes from a later date, one of St Paul's letters to a young church in Thessalonica. This reading establishes very firmly that the Redeemer Job was waiting for is Jesus Christ, not *just* a man who went about doing good but *also* the glory of God. What's this reading doing, placed on Remembrance Sunday alongside Job's words?

Maybe it gives us a different angle to examine the events we're commemorating today. Job's assurance of a Redeemer, one who will ensure that Job stands vindicated before God, is an assurance we can hold onto in the name of an individual who has died. It's a personal reassurance.

Paul's message to the Thessalonian church is sent to a group of people, a group very much alive although persecuted for their unpopular faith. It doesn't speak to the personal, but to society. If Job is about the redemption of a human being, this second reading is more about the redemption of the world.

We know that those early Christians were living under the Pax Romana, the peace that only applied to you if you were willing to follow Roman law. Wars, oppression, slavery and torture could be expected if you didn't want to live within Roman rule. And Paul writes to these Christians about waiting for Jesus, with a warning that times will become increasingly unstable.

Back to my early adulthood, when I imagined that Remembrance Sunday would become a thing of the past, I had been lucky enough to see on my TV enormous gains for peace, like the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of South Africa's apartheid regime. And although those same TV screens showed horrors like the Tiananmen Square massacre, the genocide in Rwanda, the war as Yugoslavia fell apart, and growing evidence for climate change, I was naïve enough to imagine they *could not* affect my peace, our peace, in Western Europe.

'Let no one deceive you in any way', says St Paul in that reading. I was deceived. The sense that humanity was on the up and up, that the march of progress leads inevitably to better things, was a comfort and a strength to us. And there were wonderful, even miraculous, triumphs of the human spirit at that time, and optimism is always a good way to ensure that more good can be produced, through human cooperation and reaching out to others.

Now, younger generations than me, don't necessarily share that sense of optimism. Maybe younger people are more able to spot it when leaders do what Paul talks about. St Paul talks about a leader who exalts himself, even above gods, a leader who takes his seat in the temple and declares *himself* to be God. There's a trend, past and present, to try to find one single leader who matches this description. Maybe it's more realistic to say that there have been many of them, and we see them still today, these "lawless ones", who claim the power of life and death over their citizens, over opponents, over countries they want to overtake.

So, while our reading from Job gives us peace and reassurance that those who lost their lives in conflict have a hope and a future of peace, the reading from Thessalonians reminds us that the world is far from right, and that peace from oppressors and dictators isn't something we can take for granted.

The hope offered by St Paul is not an individual one, but a collective hope for a world which has never been fully at peace. Our collective prayers for peace today can't be what a poet calls, 'the easy peace, based on complacency'. This poet, Alan Gaunt, goes on: 'We pray for peace, but not the cruel peace, leaving God's poor bereft and dying in distress, we pray for real peace, enriching all the human race.'

If you'll let me quote Alan Gaunt a little further, you'll hear him tie up this hope for *peace with justice*, peace for nature as well as for humans, in words which bring us back to the reading: 'We pray for peace: holy communion with Christ our risen Lord and every living thing; God's will fulfilled on earth and all his creatures reconciled.'

Today, on Remembrance Sunday, we come in grateful recognition of those who have died in bringing or restoring peace and justice. We come in sorrowful recognition for those who have died in unjust wars and violence. We come in hopeful recognition that death is not the end. And we come in collective recognition that for peace, with justice, we must allow our prayers to lead us to action in keeping with those prayers.

Please bow your heads as I end with a prayer from Alan Gaunt's hymn:

We pray for peace,

but not the easy peace built on complacency and not the truth of God.

We pray for real peace, the peace God's love alone can seal.

Amen