

It is with deep regret that we find ourselves once again not able to worship with one another and our God. The uncertainty of these times makes it difficult to make any predictions as to when we will be able to resume our services in a form that we have become accustomed to. Whilst lamenting the lockdown and the effects this has on the Church, I am grateful that we did manage to meet, pray and share at the Lords table with one another for some time before this second lockdown began. Certain individuals have enabled us to meet at Church over the past few weeks and I know I speak for all when we say thank you to those who have cleaned, maintained and kept the Church open for us.

Today is Remembrance Sunday. This is a critical time of the year where we as a country feel deeply connected to one another. It is a time when a single narrative binds together so many disparate people across this wonderful country.

What is it that binds so many of us together at this time? Is it a sense of collective gratitude? Is it our relief that the horrors of that age have not been visited upon this one? Is it an exercise in imagining how so much could be asked of those who were so young?

I wonder whether Remembrance Sunday could also be an invitation for us to consider the subject of our fundamental rights as a human being. Our human rights are something that this country has understood recently as being, in part, informed by the EU charter of fundamental rights. As we leave the EU we will look to revise this and consider what a British bill of rights would look like. Thankfully Britain has experience in this department with the 1689 Bill of rights predating all others but the Magna Carta. I stress this only to focus our thoughts for a moment on the centrality of this topic for Britain and its self understanding. It is abundantly clear to many thinkers that our rights are not something that were won for us at some remote point in history and remain enshrined forever more; rather it is something that we need to be constantly mindful of, aware that over reaching politics, technology and societal pressures are ever ready to compromise them, in part or in some cases totally.

The age of social media has raised many questions that we never knew we would be asking ourselves 15 years ago. The rate of change that we are experiencing with technology has caused many to wonder about the intrusions these technologies are making and asking what measures can be put into place to better regulate this virtual space. This is a challenge that is beyond the scope of our present limit but a tradition of remembrance time allows one to ponder anew the precious freedoms that we have been given that so many around the world simply do not have.

It is easy to comprehend the importance of holding Remembrance Day and

honouring those who make the highest sacrifice when one see's what happens to a country with a government like China; a government that doesn't uphold the same values and regards life with disdain. The freedoms that have been gained for us are utterly priceless and are our antidote to tyranny. Like many things in life, we will never know what we have been given unless it is taken away from us. No matter what encroachments the world of politics or technology makes upon our lives, by remembering the sacrifices of the soldiers of this country we are brought face to face with the spirit of freedom that we have the blessing of inheriting because of them.

*"When you go home, tell them of us and say 'For your tomorrow, we gave our today'"*

The Gospel reading today is a seemingly simple parable that once again relates to that final 'theophany' that I have been talking about for the past two weeks. This great and final visible manifestation of God to his people is for Jesus something that he is interpreting as being a manifestation of *his* glory as the eternal Son. The parable of the wise and foolish virgins can be deconstructed in the simplest way by perceiving the following: The virgins represent the Christian community, the delay of the bridegroom is the delay of the son of man, the sudden coming of the bridegroom is the unexpected arrival of the prophesied final theophany and the spurning of the foolish virgins is the rejection of the wolves in sheep's clothing.

What is it that separates the good disciples from the bad? The answer for Matthew is clearly the level of preparation that the disciples have put into their lives of Christian witness. The parable doesn't tell us what our preparation should include but it does tell us who we are preparing for. We are encouraged to think about this preparation as being like that of a conjugal union. Whilst we want to avoid many of the heavily patriarchal tropes that persisted at the time of the first century AD, we can look at the preparation of the disciple for Jesus as like that of a wife for a husband or a husband for a wife, as Christ is united with his bride the Church.

In any wedding there is expectation, preparation and ultimately complete union that consummates and makes the two one in Spirit and flesh. This intimate union is what God is calling his redeemed people to, a committed holy bond and covenant. If we are to enter into this union we are to ensure that we are presented as best as we can be for the one we are to be united with. This final manifestation of God to his people is to be an act of love where those who have prepared for the love of God and hold his people in their hearts are to be redeemed and saved by the coming of his Heavenly Kingdom.