

A few days ago I went up to the primary school to take a Remembrance Assembly.

While I was waiting for the classes to start coming in, I spotted the year six artwork on the wall (SLIDE 4) and the work they had been doing to remember this very special anniversary since the end of the first world war 100 years to the moment of the armistice at 11:00am today. (SLIDE 5)

At the beginning of the assembly I read out a whole bunch of countries and asked what they had in common and after some very inventive answers it was a year six (I think) who clicked where I was going with this and said "we all remember".

I talked about remembering and I talked about the importance of choosing to remember and our freedom and towards the end I told them about holding two minutes silence. I then said we were going to do the same. Now bear in mind some of the children in early years a very very young. They stood, and remained still and were absolutely silent and all of them behaved impeccably. After a period they quietly sat down and I asked how long it had felt...1 minute, 2 minutes. It had only been 30 seconds...but for those very little ones it was a long time – but there at school we had our own remembrance.

Of course it's something we share. Out of interest I checked to see the places our Borough is twinned with – and some were twinned with Maidenhead and some with Windsor and so now as RBWM – we have six (Slide 6)

Each place experienced the conflicts in very different ways, but nowhere remains untouched. There isn't time today to go into each place in detail – but the first is the suburb of Paris where the American hospital of Paris is situated. In the first World War they ran military hospitals, known as Ambulances and treated

extra-ordinary numbers of wounded men...at one time they were receiving 1900 wounded every day.

In 1943, during [World War II](#), Frascati was [heavily bombed](#) because it contained the German General Headquarters for the Mediterranean zone. Approximately 50% of its buildings, including many monuments, villas and houses, were destroyed. One thousand Italians and 150 Germans died in that air strike and in a second air strike on January 22, 1944, the day of the battle of Anzio ([Operation Shingle](#)).

Kortrijk in Belgium was very heavily bombed in the summer of 1917 and liberated the following year by the British Army. In World War two it was an important railway hub for the Germans and was targeted heavily by the RAF.

All of these places now linked to us, experiencing the conflicts in different ways – but nowhere untouched by loss and suffering.

And so we share Remembrance. Mrs May our prime Minister joined the French President and the Belgian Prime Minister to lay wreaths marking the centenary of the end of the first World War. She has paid her respects at the grave of Londoner John Parr who is believed to be the first British Soldier killed at the outbreak of war in 1914 – he was 17 years old St.Symphorien Military Cemetery in Mons. She is also to lay a wreath at the grave of George Ellison, killed by a German sniper on the Western Front just 90 minutes before the armistice at 11am on the 11th on November 1914

Remembrance and Armistice is not held in the same way in Germany. On the second Sunday before Advent they have a national day of mourning.

So we share together remembering the cost and sacrifice of lives given to bring peace and freedom. In parish churches across the country the names will be read out as they were here today, and

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in some parish churches they will have added names to their lists. The Falklands, Afghanistan, Iraq and other conflicts keep adding to the numbers of those who pay the ultimate price for peace.

Capturing the essence of what the cost might be to go and fight for peace, Rupert Brooke wrote this Poem in 1915

If I should die, think only this of me:
That there's some corner of a [foreign](#) field
That is for ever England. There shall be
In that rich earth a richer dust concealed;
A dust whom England bore, shaped, made aware,
Gave, once, her flowers to love, her ways to roam,
A body of England's, breathing English air,
Washed by the rivers, blest by suns of home.
And think, this heart, all evil shed away,
A pulse in the eternal mind, no less
Gives somewhere back the thoughts by England given;
Her sights and sounds; dreams happy as her day;
And laughter, learnt of friends; and gentleness,
In hearts at peace, under an English heaven.

Our next hymn carries these lines in the second verse...

And whether our tomorrow be filled with good or ill, we'll triumph through our sorrow and rise to bless you still.

Let's raise our voices in worship on this remembrance day.

In 1998 Steven Spielberg and Tom Hanks released the film they collaborated on called Saving Private Ryan.

At the start of the film we see an older man walking into the American military cemetery in Normandy. He is accompanied by his wife and children and grandchildren and the sight of all the graves so beautifully laid out and cared for is too much – he is overcome.

At the end of the film we return to the scene and he's found the grave he was looking for. Now the film has been released for 20 years so I don't think I can be accused of spoiling the story. It's based on a true story although inevitably the film is never quite like the actual events.

The department of the army discover that one woman has lost three of her sons in the conflict and a fourth is still in the thick of it. They decide she cannot lose her remaining son and so a platoon is sent out to save private Ryan, and it's the elderly Ryan we see at the start and the end of the film.

At the end he says to his wife "Tell me I've led a good life – tell me I'm a good man".

I know it's a film and a scriptwriter will have crafted these words but they are very good words.

Am I leading a good life
Am I good person.

In the film, Ryan is specifically aware of the soldiers who died to save him and there will be those here today who are remembering family and friends and comrades who died. Because, for most of us, it's a little more remote than the sacrifices depicted in the film, we might not feel it as acutely as the lead character...but perhaps today, we allow ourselves to feel and recognise the cost of peace and freedom.

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How do we use that freedom?

Am I leading a good life?

Am I a good man?

The roll of honour for this small parish for the first world war is 50 names.

For the second – is another 33.

Bearing in mind the population has greatly increased, what a toll on the families of local people in those conflicts.

In the roll of honour for the first world war – three share the surname White...I wonder if they were all the same family? It would be more than likely.

Just less than two weeks ago I conducted my uncles funeral. Douglas Hollywell did national service with the RAF but was always grateful he didn't see conflict.

After the service at my cousins house he dragged out a folder his Mother had kept concerning our Grandfather – Charles Fredrick Hutchinson. Although I have the family name – he had all the papers because his mother had carefully kept them.

Together we looked through them never having seen many of them before.

My grandfather was in the navy in the first world war and survived and left the navy although he signed on as naval reserve. He was called up in the second world war and served on a destroyer and such is the access we have through the internet, I could type in the name and discover that this was the ship. (Slide) Quite a curious sensation to think of my grandfather serving on this ship.

He lost his life in a dive bomb attack, he was hit by shrapnel and on small faded pieces of paper, we traced the news sent to our grandmother, the aftermath, the snippet from the local paper of his death.

He and thousands upon thousands of others signed up, were called up and went to serve knowing fully what the end result might be. The annual act of remembrance and particularly the special anniversary of the 100 years since armistice invites us to say thank you.

What has been in my mind is the powerful scene from the opening and close of the Spielberg film and the questions I spoke earlier.

How am I using the freedom that they gave their lives to win?

Am I leading a good life?

Am I a good man?

Of course freedom – true freedom allows people to choose to not remember. Or not wear a poppy. Or not think about it the same way – that is the point of freedom. I'm glad though to remember and share it with you, that is my choice and I make it gladly.

I'm not local and so I'm not related to any of the names on the roll of honour. But C.F Hutchinson will have been read out in the parish of St. Mark in Barrow in Furness and honoured there as I honour the names here.

At the end of our reading from Romans, St.Paul reflects that it would be rare for anyone to die for a righteous man although someone might dare to die for the sake of a good man. The focus for St.Paul is not really whether that scenario is very likely his aim is to speak of Christ who gave his life knowing he was doing so for sinners. It's in the context of our worship, our

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acknowledgement of our need for forgiveness and faith in Jesus Christ that we offer our thanks for those who gave their lives, for us.

If our remembering is to be more than just a day each year, an annual moment to be quiet, surely it should be to quietly, steadfastly, work towards the world being a better place – or to use church speak – to see the kingdom of God.

To speak up for justice, to show mercy to those on whom the world tramples, to show that greatly underrated quality – kindness - and to do so in the knowledge that whatever it might cost in time and strength and energy...it is a worthwhile offering, compared to those who gave their all.

Our gathering this evening at the recreation ground is coordinated with many other nationally and internationally to give thanks for the 100 years since the armistice. Songs, readings, poetry, and at 7:00pm the lighting of a beacon bonfire all are welcome to come to that special event – for now we shall continue with our next hymn – the words for this one are one screen, not in the books.