**#58 13 November 2022 AS Remembrance Sunday**

**Malachi 4: 1-2a**

**4**[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Malachi%204:1-2&version=NRSVA#fen-NRSVA-23140a)] See, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble; the day that comes shall burn them up, says the Lord of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch. **2**But for you who revere my name the sun of righteousness shall rise, with healing in its wings.

**Luke 21: 5-19**

**5**When some were speaking about the temple, how it was adorned with beautiful stones and gifts dedicated to God, he said, **6**‘As for these things that you see, the days will come when not one stone will be left upon another; all will be thrown down.’

**7**They asked him, ‘Teacher, when will this be, and what will be the sign that this is about to take place?’ **8**And he said, ‘Beware that you are not led astray; for many will come in my name and say, “I am he!”[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+21%3A+5-19&version=NRSVA#fen-NRSVA-25826a)] and, “The time is near!”[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+21%3A+5-19&version=NRSVA#fen-NRSVA-25826b)] Do not go after them.

**9**‘When you hear of wars and insurrections, do not be terrified; for these things must take place first, but the end will not follow immediately.’ **10**Then he said to them, ‘Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; **11**there will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and plagues; and there will be dreadful portents and great signs from heaven.

**12**‘But before all this occurs, they will arrest you and persecute you; they will hand you over to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors because of my name. **13**This will give you an opportunity to testify. **14**So make up your minds not to prepare your defence in advance; **15**for I will give you words[[c](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+21%3A+5-19&version=NRSVA#fen-NRSVA-25833c)] and a wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to withstand or contradict. **16**You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, by relatives and friends; and they will put some of you to death. **17**You will be hated by all because of my name. **18**But not a hair of your head will perish. **19**By your endurance you will gain your souls.

This time of year, remembrance, always feels very charged for me – with no particular reason; I’m not aware of any great military past in the Sandland family, no-one that we are remembering with sadness; it’s not personal in that way. My generation is, in many ways, very lucky to have had wars fought for us, laying aside for a moment the moment the question if I approved of war on my behalf – but for all of my life there’s never been any hint of being conscripted to serve, not even for National Service.

Today we remember those who didn’t have the luxury of living out of the line of fire. It’s an unimaginable sacrifice made on our behalf; and of course, people are still doing it; when we read ‘for your tomorrow, we gave our today,’ as we will soon, we are humbled; and we are thankful.

Our whole faith is based on a ‘full, perfect and sufficient sacrifice’, as the Book of Common Prayer has it, made on our behalf. We celebrate that sacrifice in the Eucharist, we give thanks for it, and we pray it every week. We recall what it meant then, in Acts we read about what it meant for the community after Jesus died, and we live our lives by a set of principles of love that has grown out of that sacrifice. Breaking the bread to recall the broken body is written on our hearts.

In those dark easter hours after the crucifixion, there must have been shock and loss of an absolutely human nature. Because they didn’t know then that Jesus was coming back, however much he had tried to prepare them. He was gone. This was the stark fact; this *is* the stark fact for many people involved in war, whose memory we honour. How many families have shared the apostles’ feelings? He is gone, she is gone…how do we keep going? how do we speak with the enemy, how do we ever become friends again? How can our spears become pruning hooks?

I’ve been haunted for many years now by some verses written by Keith Douglas. Douglas was born in 1920 and died in 1944, in Normandy, on 9 June, three days after D-Day. But much of his war took place in North Africa, where he was a tank commander, and his memoir of that time, entitled ‘Alamein to Zem Zem’, is very well worth looking up. But its his poem, ‘Forget-me-not’, which he published as ‘Vergissmeinnicht’, that lays bare for me the effects of human loss.

You might like to look it up later; but here are a few lines.

*Three weeks gone and the combatants gone
returning over the nightmare ground
we found the place again, and found
the soldier sprawling in the sun.*

*…. As we came on
that day, he hit my tank with one
like the entry of a demon…*

*Look. Here in the gunpit spoil
the dishonoured picture of his girl
who has put: Steffi; Vergissmeinnicht.
in a copybook gothic script.*

*But she would weep to see today…*

*…the dust on the paper eye…*

*For here the lover and killer are mingled
who had one body and one heart.*

Wilfred Owen famously defined what he thought the pity of war was, some 30 or so years before Douglas’s verse; but I doubt if even such great writers as Owen and Sassoon quite caught the pity of war on a human level as is heard in these heart-wrenching lines.

We honour people forced to fight on our behalf today; and we honour those who have lived alongside loss forever. And I think that as Christians we also should renew the great cry, the great shriek, to disarmament in Isaiah 2:4;

**4 ‘**He will judge between the nations
    and will settle disputes for many peoples.
They will beat their swords into plowshares
    and their spears into pruning hooks.
Nation will not take up sword against nation,
    nor will they train for war anymore’.

Now, I’m not quite naive enough to say that we should leave ourselves toothless in our response to people like President Putin. But I do say that we should loudly lament what it is within our world that makes such a readiness essential.

Nor am I naive enough to think that forgiveness is easy to give or receive; I suspect that there are generations of Russians yet unborn who will be regarded as pariahs for decades to come. But I do say that we, as Christians, should be at the forefront of the creation of a humanity for whom the disarmament, the movement of swords to ploughs, a movement from destruction to creation, from hate to love, is as natural in human life as breathing is.

So my challenge to myself, and to all of us, is to continue conversations, or possibly restart them, which render war obsolete by our inclusiveness in Christ. With Malachi we say, ‘For you who revere my name the sun of righteousness shall rise, with healing in its wings’.

We honour today those lost through warfare. And, when we take communion soon, we should and will glory and rejoice in the beauty of the sacrament, as we remember the sacrifices that have been made for us, and for and by others, as we say with Christ;

This is my body, given for you; Vergissmeinnicht.

Amen

Vergissmeinicht (1943)

Keith Douglas (1920-1944)

*Three weeks gone and the combatants gone
returning over the nightmare ground
we found the place again, and found
the soldier sprawling in the sun.

The frowning barrel of his gun
overshadowing. As we came on
that day, he hit my tank with one
like the entry of a demon.

Look. Here in the gunpit spoil
the dishonoured picture of his girl
who has put: Steffi. Vergissmeinnicht.
in a copybook gothic script.

We see him almost with content,
abased, and seeming to have paid
and mocked at by his own equipment
that's hard and good when he's decayed.

But she would weep to see today
how on his skin the swart flies move;
the dust upon the paper eye
and the burst stomach like a cave.

For here the lover and killer are mingled
who had one body and one heart.
And death who had the soldier singled
has done the lover mortal hurt.*