**#36 Remembrance Sunday, 14.11.21: Richard Sandland at St. Godwald’s**

John 15,12 to 15 and 17 (KJV)

**12**This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you.

**13**Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.

**14**Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you.

**15**Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you.

**17**These things I command you, that ye love one another.

Siegfried Sassoon said that it was the Great War that changed him from someone who wrote verses into a real poet. It was the Great War that, somehow, despite the chaos and confusion, formed his life’s work.

Sassoon would be the first to recognise his privilege; of survival of the years of 1914-18, his survival of the flu epidemic that followed, and his private wealth that gave him a relatively easy path to rebuild his life; and of his privilege to die in relative comfort, if not in complete happiness, in 1967. But Sassoon’s mind was forever troubled by the injustice of loss.

A Second Lieutenant in the Royal Welch Fusiliers, he loved his men; and he opposed the conditions that the ordinary soldier was forced to fight under. He did it both in poems and in public statements. In 1917 he published this poem, called ‘The General’;

‘“Good-morning, good-morning!” the General said

When we met him last week on our way to the line.

Now the soldiers he smiled at are most of 'em dead,

And we're cursing his staff for incompetent swine.

“He's a cheery old card,” grunted Harry to Jack

As they slogged up to Arras with rifle and pack.

But he did for them both by his plan of attack.’

Although he was awarded the Military Cross for his sometimes reckless bravery on the Western Front, which caused the men alongside whom he served to call him ‘Mad Jack,’ he came to believe that ‘the war upon which I entered as a war of defence and liberation has now become a war of aggression and conquest...  I believe the war is being deliberately prolonged by those who have the power to end it. I am a soldier, convinced that I am acting on behalf of soldiers.’

His statement was read out in Parliament; he was then invalided out of the war, being diagnosed, politically conveniently he thought, with shell-shock. He continued to oppose the way in which the war was being conducted, and to plead for the ordinary soldier, and for all people across all Services. One of his war poems starts, ‘I stood with the dead, so forsaken and still.’; he never forgot.

What is it that we do when we remember?

Jesus, at the Last Supper, shared bread and wine with his friends. In Luke’s Gospel, ‘**19 …** he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me.”’

And St Paul, in his first letter to the Corinthians, writes ‘**25**In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.”’

Jesus is giving the first Holy Communion. He is both looking backwards and forwards; I think he is certainly hoping that his life and his work is written on the hearts of his friends who have shared life’s experiences, good and bad, with him; they have been together in fear and in celebration, in sorrow and joy. These are experiences that have made the disciples the women and men that they are. Like Sassoon and his men, they have grown together in community through all of their experiences; as Sassoon said, they shared ‘archives of experiences known.’

But Jesus also, I think, also uses the word remember in a hopeful sense - re-member me, put me back together, reconstruct me and, now, go forward in your life with me fully in your hearts; if you re-member me, you might also find out how to re-member yourselves. And as we heard in our reading today, perhaps a way to do that is to find a way to love one another even, or especially, in times of conflict.

Sassoon spent a lot of time at Stanbrook Abbey in later life, just outside Worcester. As he turned into a poet, he seems to have found a way to re-member and honour the ghosts that stayed with him, the people that he still heard but saw no more. In 1950, he wrote;

‘For you live onward in my thought

Because you have not sought

Rewards that can be bought.

And so when I remember you

I think of all things rich and true

That I have reaped and wrought.’

In our prayers today, we remember all people that have been affected by war. Those who went away and who never came back; those who did come back but for whom life was never the same again; and those that love them.

We honour their sacrifice.

We honour their memory.

We thank them.

And we commend them to God.

In the name of Jesus of Nazareth.

Amen