



Bishop of Rochester – Remembrance Sunday Address 2022

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Good news seems to be in short supply at the moment. The cost of living crisis, tax rises, spending cuts, war in Ukraine, mortgage rates, climate change and climate protests - the list goes on and on!

And underlying all this, there is what feels like a deep sense of unease about the way the world is going and how that is affecting us, and especially our children and grandchildren. Many of the old certainties seem to have been shaken, and some of our key reference points, such as the late Queen Elizabeth, are simply no longer there in the way they were.

I have always been rather sceptical about the way politicians and commentators have talked about the “war on terror” or the “war on drugs”, because it risked demonising particular people and allowing us to over-simplify both our analysis and our response to complex problems. It made for good headlines but bad policy-making, whether in foreign intervention based on dodgy dossiers or tackling the root causes of drug culture in many of our cities, towns and even villages.

The irony is, however, that we are now very much involved in a real war, right on the edge of our own continent, and one that is profoundly affecting the life of every single person in our nation. It is affecting the price of the fuel we put in our cars, the cost of heating our homes, and of putting food on the table.

And yet, in terms of the public mood, we do not seem to have woken up to the fact that we are caught up in the consequences of a war and are facing many of the challenges that brings, whether that is having Ukrainian refugees in our local communities or the rising cost and sometimes the unavailability of things we have previously taken for granted. We seem to be in some kind of collective denial about what we are going through, with the result that everyone still expects the Government (or whoever) to sort everything out by teatime tomorrow.

In the midst of all this turmoil and uncertainty, our Bible reading today - and our whole Christian faith - offers us *hope*. Paul is writing as someone under tremendous pressure; he is under house arrest in the imperial city of Rome and facing trial before the ruthless and unpredictable ruler of an increasingly hostile empire. Christians were an easy target, a convenient scapegoat for the latest round of woes to befall Roman society – often ending up thrown to the lions in the arena and branded enemies of the state.

Yet despite all that he and his fellow believers are having to endure, Paul holds onto and defiantly celebrates the hope that he has in Christ. No matter what happens, he is utterly convinced of God’s love, from which nothing and no one will be able to separate him, and all who share his faith in Christ.

Now that kind of hope is a very powerful thing. It sustained Paul through all that he had to face, and it has sustained countless generations of believers through

war and famine and disaster of every kind. It is hope that enables us to carry on and to overcome whatever privations and difficulties we are facing - and not to do so just for our own sakes, but for the sake of one another and for the sake of what we believe in.

It was that kind of hope that saw the people of this nation through the dark days of the Second World War and that now is helping to sustain the people of Ukraine in the face of the horrendous onslaught of Vladimir Putin's military might.

And it is that kind of hope that has the power to rekindle a shared sense of purpose in the life of our nation and beyond. A hope rooted in faith in the goodness and sovereignty of God, revealed in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. A hope focused on the coming of God's kingdom of justice and peace, which leads us to look beyond our own interests towards the good of all and the needs of the weakest and most vulnerable, not only here at home but across the world.

I believe it is that hope alone that can enable us to rediscover a sense of shared purpose that is beyond political allegiances, and inspire us to work together to shape a new and better world for our children and grandchildren. To do that would also be to honour those we remember today, and to ensure that their sacrifice was not in vain.

In the midst of all that we are going through, it is time to stop tearing each other apart, in the press or on social media or wherever else, and to start working together once more for the cause of justice and peace for all. President Roosevelt famously said, "We have nothing to fear except fear itself" - well, the antidote to fear, the only thing that can enable us to overcome our fears and so become the people we could really be, is hope. And the source of that hope is Jesus Christ, who conquered death and rose victorious from the grave.

Let us take hold of that hope once more, allowing it to lift our eyes and to transform how we live, for the sake of God's kingdom of peace, here on earth as it is in heaven. Amen.

Jonathan, Bishop of Rochester
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