**Remembrance Sunday 8 November 2020**

**(Matthew 5:1-12)**

We gather today in challenging circumstances, for our nation and for the family of nations, as the ground beneath us continues to shift unpredictably.

And even though we cannot gather in person, here in church or at the War Memorial, we are determined to find another way – because we have said, ‘We will remember them’. This year, we are *together online* to keep that promise, and we are thankful that we have the permission, the safe space, the technology, and the people to make possible the live-streaming of this service.

Nick Baines, the Bishop of Leeds, has said this about remembrance:

‘It is often observed that to remember is, literally, to ‘re-member’ – that is, to put back together the pieces of our story in order to create as honest a narrative as we can. It allows for regret as well as vindication, repentance as well as gratitude; ... for looking reality in the eye before moving on to hope or remedy’.

This service is about looking reality in the eye and then moving on to hope. As we re-member past conflicts we also call to mind current ones. So as well as honouring members of the armed forces we might also think of all those who keep us safe from *any* kind of danger.

Alex Bennett, an Army Chaplain based until recently at Catterick Garrison, has written this about military service.

‘From the Armistice of 11 November 1918 we have Remembrance Day as a time to reflect on the sin of war and conflict. It is a time for Christians to pray for the peace of the world, and though we have often failed in the Lord’s service, through his love we work for a world renewed through justice and peace.

‘From earliest times, Christians have served in the military… Mindful of the teaching of Jesus Christ, faithful military service is an honourable tradition, putting the needs of others before one’s own and seeking to work for peace and to defend freedom. Many people serving in the military today are deployed for humanitarian assistance. They help to work for that peaceable kingdom which the Lord wills for our world.’

The reading we heard from Lord Houghton, comes from the ‘Sermon on the Mount’ in which Jesus speaks in detail about the nature and the values of that kingdom. The particular passage we heard lists a number of challenging situations in which, paradoxically it seems, people are ‘blessed’. The Latin for ‘blessed are’ is *beati sunt*, the derivation of the word by which this list is widely known: the Beatitudes.

Here, the theologian Nick King, in his own translation of the Bible, uses the word ‘congratulations’ rather than ‘blessed’. So it is ‘*Congratulations* to the peacemakers, and to ‘those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake’. Nick King justifies this interpretation by reminding us that Jesus goes on to say that if we endure in any of the situations listed we have reason to ‘rejoice and be glad’.

It is good to be reminded, then, especially in these early days of a second national lockdown, that in the midst of *any* challenge that life may throw at us we can still be joyful. To be ‘poor in spirit’ is to ‘know our need of God’. So to be in *any* kind of need opens us up to know our need of God – and if we know this then we can be ‘congratulated’! God has shown in the past that he will never let us down. Remembrance is literally to ‘re-member’ this, to put back together the pieces of our story, enabling us then ‘to look reality in the eye [and] move on to hope or remedy’.

It was Stephen Cottrell, the new Archbishop of York, who observed that a living tradition – if rooted and grounded in the truth – must inevitably evolve. As a living thing it cannot remain the same, but rather it assimilates changing circumstances, whilst remaining rooted in the truth.

Our tradition on Remembrance Sunday here in Richmond is a service packed with members of the community, civic leaders, and a strong military and Royal British Legion presence. This is followed by an Act of Remembrance at the War Memorial on a similarly packed Friary Gardens. Then, we have a further Act of Remembrance at the Green Howards’ Memorial at the top of Frenchgate.

None of these events can take place this year. However, we are having a service live-streamed from this empty church, and there will be the private laying of wreaths in the Friary Gardens. But with no event taking place at the Green Howards’ Memorial, and given that in this church we proudly house the Green Howards’ Regimental Chapel, we are taking the opportunity to evolve the way we remember the role played by that Regiment over the years.

It was for this reason that we invited two members of the Green Howards Association to play a part in today’s service, and why later in the service we will remember a selection of Green Howards by name. These are soldiers who gave their lives to safeguard our peace, and who ‘served the cause of liberty and truth’.

As I have suggested already, we will remember them bearing in mind Jesus’ words, ‘*Congratulations,* to the peacemakers’. In remembering them by name we make real their story, and ours; we make real the hope, the Christian hope, that we all share – a hope that gives us every reason to ‘rejoice and be glad’.

If remembrance enables us to ‘to look reality in the eye [and] move on to hope or remedy’ then we can be confident that by God’s grace we will find a remedy even for the ills created in individual lives and in society as a whole by Covid-19. Likewise, the Christian hope is in the ultimate fulfilment of all things, when the kingdom of heaven will be fully manifest here on earth. Jesus said, ‘Blessed are those who know their need of God, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven’.

Of the names inscribed on the World War 1 Memorial in the Friary Gardens forty-two had served with the Green Howards. We will be remembering each of these names later, but here are some brief details behind four of them.

Private Henry George Benson, son of Mr G J Benson of 28 Victoria Road, Richmond. Killed on 27 May 1915, aged 26. Commemorated on Panel 33 of the Menin Gate in Ypres.

Private Charles Percy Tempest, son of Thomas and Emily Tempest of 17 Mill Lane, Richmond. Killed on 1 July 1916, aged 16 (!). Buried at Dantzig Alley British Cemetery, Mametz.

Private Reginald Brand, son of Charles and Esther Brand of 1 Gallowgate, Richmond. Killed on 23 April 1915, aged 25. Buried at Feuchy Chapel British Cemetery, Wancourt, and in whose memory with that of John Watkin, the First World War memorial bell in this church was given. It is this bell which will be rung today to signal the end of the Two Minutes Silence.

Lieutenant Colonel Bertram Henry Leatham, DSO [Distinguished Service Order], husband of Everil Leatham of 30 Frenchgate, Richmond. Killed 26 September 1915, aged 34. Buried at Vermelle British Cemetery; commemorated in a memorial in this church.

There are several other memorials to Green Howards along the south wall of this church, all officers with distinguished records, fully befitting the proud traditions of the regiment. And there are many other Green Howards who do not have memorials, here or anywhere else, and whose story is therefore less well known. Amongst them are three local men and these are their stories.

Christopher and Cyril Fawcett were two brothers who grew up at 55 Frenchgate, almost opposite the top of Church Wynd. A current resident of Frenchgate, Paul Goad, tells us this about them,

‘At the outbreak of World War 1 Christopher was 20 and Cyril 14. As the eldest, Christopher was the first to enlist, in November 1915. Prior to enlistment he had worked as a butcher. In January 1916 he joined up and was stationed at Seaham Harbour, through to June 1918. A copy of a charge sheet shows that Christopher was late returning from leave on June 12th 1916, for which he forfeited a day’s pay!

In October 1917 Cyril enlisted at the age of 18 years and 1 month, giving his trade as a Motor Driver. Following initial training, he joined his Battalion in France on 1st April 1918. In May that year they were moved to a ‘quiet’ part of the front, south of the River Aisne. When the Germans later attacked losses were significant, with Cyril being one of the many casualties. He was posthumously awarded the British War Medal and Victory Medal.

At the time of his brother’s death, Christopher was hospitalised in Seaham Infirmary with influenza. In late 1918 he was transferred to the 12th Battalion and joined them in Italy. He returned to England in October 1919 before being demobilised the following month. He too, was subsequently awarded the British War Medal and Victory Medal.

Christopher returned to his pre-war employer, Sykes and Sons, Butchers. He married Edith Bickerdike in the autumn of 1930 and they had two children, Margaret and David. He continued to live in Richmond until his death in 1960.

Meanwhile, George Ellis who was born in Old Malton, had joined the Green Howards in around 1905. In the same year he married Annie Hemstock, a Richmond girl. Their family of three sons and a daughter were raised in the barracks, now the Garden Village.

George had served during the Boer War and during the First World War he was transferred to the 13th Battalion who were involved in the Battle of Cambrai.

On 23rd November 1917 he was sent up to the front line with his battalion with the aim of taking Bourlon Wood and the village. Tanks were sent in, with the infantry following up; eventually the village was taken after hand-to-hand fighting.

George died during this advance and while his body was never found his name is inscribed on Panel 5 of the Cambrai Memorial. After his death the family were moved from the barracks into a house inside Richmond Castle.

It is sobering to think that of the 65,000 soldiers who joined the Green Howards in the First World War 9,200 lost their lives. The Roll of Honour in the Green Howards’ Chapel here in this church includes 7,500 of these.

Today, as we seek to honour and to ‘congratulate’ each of them, that number is surely too great for us to take in. And of course it does not even begin to include those who lost their lives in other conflicts or in peacetime – to say nothing of those who served with other regiments or indeed in the other branches of the armed forces. During the Act of Remembrance we will content ourselves with naming a representative sample of Green Howards who served in the First World War to uphold the cause of liberty and truth.

Thanks be to God for them, and for his assurance that for all who know their need of God theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Amen.

**Roll of Honour**

**Green Howards commemorated on the World War 1 Memorial**

**in the Friary Gardens, Richmond**

Robert Allinson

Thomas Bainbridge

Walter Barker

John Battye

James Benbow

Miles Bennison

**Henry Benson**

**Reginald Brand**

John Brown

Randal Croft

**George Ellis**

**Cyril Fawcett**

Harold Fawcett

Arthur Franklin

John Haw

Frederick Hatton

Frederick Horton

John Kearton

John Hutchinson

Harry Kinchin

Robert Layfield

**Bertram Leatham**

Frederick Mansfield

James Martin

Harold Matthews

John Metcalfe

Robert Murray

John O’Hern

Harry Pickersgill

John Ringrose

John Robinson

Gilbert Rumbellow

William Shields

Henry Swinburn

**Charles Tempest**

John Thompson

Arthur Thornhill

Richard Thornhill

Marmaduke Thwaites

Frederick Topham

William Welsh

Charles Wheeler

Alfred Woodhams