

Sermons at the Anglican Church of Luxembourg

Preached by Rev Geoff Read on Remembrance Sunday 2018

Text: Revelation 21:1-7

Today we mark how 100 years ago the destructive din of battle was replaced by silence and peace

What was confidently called “The War to end all Wars” sadly proved not to be, and so in 1918 Europe moved forwards not into lasting peace but into what we now know to have only been an inter-War period

And so last Friday marked the 80th anniversary of Kristallnacht, the significant precursor to not only a second World War, but the consequences of nationalism and of prejudice that then seemed unimaginable and still today leaves us stunned by its scale and, in the words of Hannah Arendt, the “ordinariness” of those who perpetrated that monstrous evil.

As they reflect on current national and international politics and society Press, Politicians and Pundits have been quick to rightly point to worrying parallels between then and now both here in Europe and also across various ponds

The safeguards of hard-won negotiated treaties and international organisations aimed at preserving and promoting peace seem under threat in a way as never before as those who seem to have short memories and even shorter horizons work to dismantle those safeguards with a strange glee and little or no thought as to what new relationships need to be in place and how to foster the all essential ingredients of trust and concern for the common good

My job, as a Christian clergyman is not to play amateur pundit but professional theologian and to offer, briefly, into our remembering the perspective of the Christian faith on this important day.

The Book of Revelation is the last book of the Bible for many reasons, perhaps not least as it's the last one most people want to turn to with its weird and unsettling imagery, that can make it a happy hunting ground for religious conspiracy theorists and end timers in equal measure.

The truth is that Revelation is not just about what will be, at some undetermined point in time in the future. Revelation is a book about Now

Written in a coded way full of symbols and characters which, arguably are now more accessible to a modern generation than ever before, bought up on computer gaming fantasy and Harry Potter, originally that Now was late first century Rome where the Empire was flexing its muscles but even then, had within it seeds of its eventual decline and fall. Those reading it faced persecution and martyrdom

What the book of Revelation did then and does now is invite people to go around the back of history, like back stage at a play, to consider the events of the day from the perspective of faith:

- to see what plays out here on earth through human agency as also being part of something much bigger,

- the clash of good and evil which sometimes only the events we so rightly remember today give us chilling insight into

In our reading, God speaks of a new heaven and a new earth, the end of death, and hence of suffering and tears

But not just at some point in the future, when it's all over – for sure that is when it will be fully fulfilled

This is a promise for Now:

- for the now of the first century
- the now of the unspeakable horrors of the twentieth
- and the now of the uncertainties we face again today

That somehow even in the midst of the uncertainty and pain of Now, God is true to His promise: “See, I am making all things new” – working out My purposes, bringing in My Kingdom

Significantly, that daring - for some laughable - claim, is only possible because of two short words: “home” and “dwell”

“See, the home of God is among mortals, He will dwell with them as their God, and they will be His peoples” (21:3)

How?

By, Christians believe, God remaining not aloft and aloof, but entering into His world, into its glory and its mess, in the person of Jesus

Through Jesus' life, His death and His Resurrection, God began a radical transformation of Now – one that sometimes is about the transformation of the situation itself, but more often than not, it's through the transformation of the individuals involved

And it's that transformation of individuals that we particularly honour today:

- courage that isn't the absence of fear, but overcoming it to stand, march and fight
- love of country that isn't necessarily about subscribing to its politics, but stepping up to protect people and values that are cherished and dear
- self-sacrifice that isn't about liking someone or something, but nevertheless setting aside self to be part of something bigger in which trust, reliability and doing of duty replace personal preference or safety

“Now” being transformed by God - this is the perspective of faith

Alone it is not sufficient to explain what is and what might be.

But without it, I suggest, we fail to grasp the full richness of all that we remember today