**Remembrance Sunday Address 2022**

24th February 2022 has already entered the annals of military history.

On that day, as we all recall so clearly, the war between Russia and Ukraine began. Today, victims of that war live amongst us in our community here in Aston Fields and Finstall. And they are very welcome. The least we can do, is recognise our shared humanity and offer the stranger, our hand of friendship and of peace.

The Festival of Remembrance holds a paradox at its heart. In one sense, it represents a communal remembering of events long ago, events that increasingly, as the years pass, have fewer living witnesses. Simultaneously, we are reminded, whether through familiar, familial stories handed down the generations, or through a very present understanding of today’s wars, as in Ukraine - in either case, we are reminded that there is nothing historic about war: its pain and heartache is carried as easily across time as across culture and language. We all suffer its ill effects. Whatever view we hold of one conflict or another, we know that war represents the failure of humanity to live with its differences positively and creatively. War diminishes the ability of each of us to be fully human.

The beauty of this service is that it honours the past with solemnity and dignity, whilst also honouring the future with optimism and hope.

Our Act of Remembrance is followed by Our Act of Commitment. Refusing to allow us to remain stuck in the horrors of war, the service calls us into a future that we shall define and determine for ourselves. By strengthening our resistance to all that makes for war, we can build a more peace-filled world. We simply have to choose to do so.

Modern wars no longer rely exclusively on weapons that destroy or kill. The military planners also conduct wars economically and we have seen that this year with the energy crisis and the subsequent cost of living crisis too.

War is multi-faceted which makes its potency more dangerous but ironically also means we can resist it on more fronts. Some of the most active peacemakers are now to be found in the high street, for the economic choices each of us makes every day can challenge the presumptions upon which modern war is fought.

Added to which, the greatest threat to humanity is not military at all, but climatic. Humanity’s greed for economic advantage and power is on course to destroy humanity itself. Another irony, is that climate change doesn’t threaten the world, only humanity’s place within it. Creation will continue.

So, for those of us who want a different world: a more equal, more peaceful, more generous, creative, respectful world, there has never been a more important nor an easier time to become a peacemaker.

The cost-of-living crisis means genuine pain, cold and hunger to millions of people and our churches in Bromsgrove are playing their part in meeting these new needs locally. But the economic crisis also provides an opportunity for all of us to resist the materialist, consumerist culture that has come to dominate our country these past 40 years. If this were weakened, economic growth would cease to be the mantra that drives the exploitation of our world, and our appeal to aggressive warmongers would diminish.

This aspiration is deeply rooted in the Christian tradition. Scripture teaches us that creation is God’s gift to humanity, for us to manage with care and respect, and that all people, regardless of culture or age, are born equal, sons and daughters of God.

Exploitation of creation and of one another therefore has no place in God’s realm, whatever form it takes. Undermining the tendency for nations to develop antipathies to one another begins with all of us being prepared to believe that the world, our nation, our street, can be different. And then following through on that belief, to try and ensure that as many of our ordinary decisions as possible reflect the values we hold dear.

This isn’t easy, and I speak as someone who travels to the other side of the world every year to visit family. Our decisions have consequences; our children and their children deserve that from now on we take decisions that are in their best long-term interests.

As you wrestle, as I do, with how to undermine the causes of war, remember Jesus’ faith in the power of the mustard seed. Greatness is unleashed from the most unlikely and unpromising starts. So let us begin, and see where faith takes us.

Amen.