

The Parish of Bardsey with East Keswick

Sermon

Sunday 12 November 2023: Angela Hannafin

Good morning and welcome to another Sofa sermon. Today is Remembrance Sunday and our scripture reading is from Paul's letter to the church in Rome.

What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, 'For your sake we are being killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered.' No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The most important phrase in this Bible reading is that nothing can separate us from God's love, not the worst of life, which for Paul was pretty bad. In Paul's own words, he had been imprisoned, flogged, faced death, received forty lashes minus one, been beaten with rods, pelted with stones, shipwrecked, been lost at sea. He had known hunger, thirst, been cold and naked. He also said he had faced daily pressure of concern for all the churches. So he encountered pressure and stress of looking after many people. For most of us even encountering one of these things could leave us traumatised. But ever since Jesus had spoken to Paul on the road to Damascus, Paul's life and entire purpose had changed. He had spoken about the most important thing for him now was knowing Jesus. Nothing could get in the way of that relationship. Nothing could separate him from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. And he said he was convinced that nothing – neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, could change the love that he received daily from Jesus.

On Remembrance Sunday we remember the horror of war, surely the worst thing that can happen to anyone. We think about the importance of peace as an antidote to war. Paul wrote from prison that God's peace had the capacity to

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go beyond all understanding. If anyone had reason to justify what they were writing, it was Paul. He only had to look at the prison wall. But even in those worst of times, God's peace could sustain him. Peace is part of the fruits of the Holy Spirit – in other words, when God lives in us, we can experience peace even when our circumstances dictate otherwise. Peace is not something ethereal, or abstract, but something real, that can hold us in times of crisis. Blessed are the peacemakers said Jesus. We must keep praying for them and their work often taking place silently and without thanks, sustaining us in the worst of times.

Every year, we remember all those who gave their lives for our freedom during two world wars and numerous other conflicts. We give thanks for their sacrifice and recognise the value of life. We remember the horror of war, and what we must do to avoid it. At a time when peace has been seriously undermined in Europe and the Middle East, we are aware of the dangers of war all over again. We must keep praying for peace. I grew up in the 1970s where peace on earth was wishful thinking from young beauty queens. And yet there is a reality is that war is all around us – we see it everywhere at the moment - and we must keep praying for peace on earth. Jesus prayed that we would be one – that's a prayer that's as yet unanswered as long as there is war in the world.

At Art Club on Thursday we looked at an image of a dove, the sign of peace. This dove we looked at was perfectly white, but somehow was bathed in a beautiful spectrum of rainbow colours. White light comprises all the hues in the visible light spectrum. So, the dove is perfectly inclusive and reminds us that God's peace is for all in a relationship with Jesus. This sign of peace is a sign for Jesus, the Prince of Peace. The dove also took us back to those moments in the Bible when God's peace was marked – after the storm had subsided for Noah and at Jesus' baptism. Both those occasions were new beginnings and an encouragement to start again. Today, we pledge to give ourselves once again to God, in the name of humanity, remembering death, and we are aware that we must give thanks for life and its value. We commit ourselves to work and live peaceably with others. We commit ourselves not to forget that God and his love is always with us. We commit ourselves to the hope of a new beginning with God, even if the circumstances still don't look good. Whatever we face ahead, there is no obstacle to the love of Jesus Christ our Lord the Prince of Peace.

So today, on Remembrance Sunday, as we remember the importance of peace, we ask God to fill us with his Holy Spirit so that we will be people of peace, and that God's love and peace will flood our lives, our communities and our countries. We ask God to help us remember his everlasting promise to be with us, that nothing can ever separate us from his love, no matter how bad things get. In Jesus' name. AMEN