

**Remembrance Sunday**

**What kind of world?**

*Ruth 3:1-5; 4:13-17; Hebrews 9:24-28*

The 1918 United Kingdom general election was called immediately after the Armistice with Germany, which ended the First World War, and held in December 1918. It was the first general election to include on a single day all eligible voters of the United Kingdom, and the vote count was delayed so that the ballots cast by soldiers serving overseas could be included in the count. It was the first General Election to be held after the enactment of the Representation of the People Act of 1918, so women over the age of thirty, and all men over the age of twenty-one, could vote. Previously all women and many men from poorer backgrounds were excluded from voting. You could fight, and die for your country from the age of 18, if you were male, but could not vote. You could work in munitions factories, as a nurse at the front line, or on a farm if you were a woman, but not vote until you were 30. It was a different world.

World War One was to be the war that ended all wars, but it did not. In the 1918 General Election campaign, the Prime Minister of the day, David Lloyd George, promised comprehensive reforms to deal with poor education, housing, health and transport, 'a land fit for heroes to live in'. But it was not.

Yesterday at our Peace Festival we not only thought about the ending of World War One, but also, with representatives of the National Youth Assembly, thought about what kind of world we wanted to live in. It's the Year of the Young Person and it was good to hear what they had to say. But we all have a voice, and we all need to ask that question of ourselves and of each other, 'What kind of world do we want to live in?'

It would be easy to blurt out the usual beauty queen banalities of a cure for cancer, the eradication of poverty and the ending of war and the achievement of world peace. These should not be banalities; these should be realities. To achieve them, or even begin to approach achieving them, will never be easy. The American general Norman Schwarzkopf once said,

“The more you sweat in peace, the less you bleed in war.” I look around the world today, and we’re still bleeding; and not only from war and the consequences of war.

Reading from the Old Testament is rarely without challenge, but often more rewarding than we might think at first glance. Take that story from Ruth, for example. At first sight, it seems so inappropriate to our society today, demeaning to women, and with nothing to say to us. Ruth, a young widow, an immigrant refugee in a country that was not her own, alone apart from her mother-in-law, is vulnerable and at risk. This story set in a patriarchal society, where women had to stick together for protection, and often found themselves in situations we today would find unacceptable. In a world where a woman’s worth was often only her body, Ruth, prompted by her mother-in-law Naomi, found herself forced into finding protection, status and money by the use of her body and sexuality. It’s a hard story to read and hard to hear. By reading it and hearing it we don’t condone it. By reading it and hearing it we let this story speak today.

It reminds me of a story I heard in this Church two weeks ago, about a woman of Srebrenica, in the Bosnian war, being sexually brutalised after her daughter had been sexually brutalised. It speaks to me of what we heard something of on Friday night when we heard more about human trafficking and modern day slavery in our country and across the world. The story of Ruth speaks today.

I’ve been watching World War One programmes about the role of women in that War, where many still had to ‘fight’ to be allowed to work in the men’s world of ammunition making, farming and heavy industry, and often against the wishes of their own families. Without their contribution the war effort in and its outcome would very likely have been different. As a Remembrance Sunday thought, it’s one still worth holding on to today. The story of Ruth still speaks today.

Our world is very different in many ways from the C3rdBC world of Ruth, but the issues that many women face today are often not all that different, and this passage allows us to hear this. The world of Ruth and Naomi is a world of struggle, enmeshed as it is in a problematic world of violence caused largely by men. But in impossible circumstances, those women forged a way ahead.

Their story needs to be heard, and we should not write them out because their story is hard to hear. On a Remembrance Sunday, when stories of suffering and pain take many forms, we add this story to all the other stories of the forgotten, the nameless, but the essential, who have helped in positive ways to shape our country today. Ruth was the mother of Obed, and Obed was the father of Jesse, and Jesse was the father of David. And David, with Ruth, was the ancestor of Jesus.

Jesus came to bring hope, still, to the world then, and now. A hope that still needs to be heard, shared, experienced and lived out in affluent, modern, regulated C21st Britain. A hope that has to struggle, but never gives up.

What kind of world do we want to live in? What kind of world are we prepared to work for, live for, sacrifice for, and hope for in our generation? What kind of world did women and men in two World Wars and countless other conflicts and struggles, military, political, social and economic, fight through to make our land one they hoped would be fit for heroes and heroines?

What kind of world do we want for women and men today? What kind of world do we want for vulnerable older people; isolated young people; the homeless; minorities; the poorly fed and clothed? What kind of world do we want on the streets of London and other cities, including our own, where knife crimes increase and claim lives? What kind of world do we want where casual racism and unacceptable sectarianism is not so very far beneath the surface? What kind of world do we want despite the swirling gloom of Brexit, or where world leaders think that, used the right way, barbed wire can be a beautiful thing?

We could be filled with pessimism and fear and resignation, turning inwards rather than looking outwards. But we must not despair. Because the world we call into creation, the world we try to shape with our words and actions is already, and can still be one worth living for. Women and men continue to make a difference for good within their communities, and across the country, and that's something we should be proud of, and contribute towards with our time and our energy and our love.

Through healthy relationships; through community engagement; through doing that little bit extra not because we must but because we can; through seeing the bigger picture of a world transformed because the little bit of that world in which we live is a better, brighter, safer and more gracious place because of the way we behave and treat those around us, even when the going is tough.

The story of Ruth is not a sentimental one, speaking as it does about a world of danger, sexism and threat. But through Ruth's courage and her commitment, God wove simple gestures, feelings, decisions and actions in ways that brought good things. God worked on, with Ruth, despite loss and trouble, opposition and tyranny, displacement and pain; and through the brokenness, God did something that gave the world further hope, the gift of Jesus, the descendant of Ruth.

On Remembrance Sunday, this is huge. It reminds us that the names of soldiers and sailors, air crew and civilians, men and women named on these memorials and thousands elsewhere, did not die in vain. They did not change our world forever, but they played their part in doing something right in a world of wrong.

Today, what kind of world do we want? What part will we play to make our world better today and for generations to come?

**In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.**

**Amen**