

Remembrance Sunday 2025 Readings and Sermon

Micah 4:1-4 and Matthew 5:38-48

The theme of this reconciliation season is remembering well to move forward in peace. But what does it mean to remember well? And what does it mean, on this day we call Remembrance Sunday, to remember past conflicts, especially those wars of the first half of the last century whose legacy extends well into this one?

Eleven years ago I had the privilege of visiting Berlin as part of my curacy training. In that city which held so many memories of some of the great challenges of the past hundred years, we thought about world wars, about fascism, and the horrors of the Holocaust. We thought about a Cold War in a city which was once as divided as our continent. We thought about the role of the church in challenging the powers of the age – and how too often we collude with them.

What struck me was how carefully our German friends remembered. I have one memory in particular of a piece of the Berlin Wall, twenty-five years after it was supposed to have fallen, still standing on a piece of open ground surrounded by railings and overgrown with brambles and weeds. Different communities along the length of the old dividing line had made different decisions about what to do with the Wall. Some had made it into a memorial. Some had pulled it down to let something else develop in that space. This one community couldn't agree on how they wanted to remember, and so twenty-five years later their piece of wall stood there, waiting for its community to do the slow and difficult work of remembering well.

And I noticed this same care throughout Berlin: in the spare but devastating holocaust memorial that sits in the city centre; in the tiny Chapel of Reconciliation formed out of the earth of no man's land by the Wall; in the Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church where ruins and a rebuilt sanctuary sit next to one another very much like here; and in the Martin Luther Memorial Church, which is sometimes called the Nazi Church. This chilling space filled with Nazi symbolism remains as a stark reminder of how faith can warp if we are not vigilant. Difficult conversations and costly decisions happened so they could remember well.

The word that struck me from our reading from Micah today was beat. They will *beat* their swords into ploughshares. Beating one metal object into another is hard work. If you have ever watched a farrier make a horseshoe, you will have some idea of the determination and effort that is part of the process. Likewise, reconciliation is a demanding and intentional work. Are we willing not just to speak of peace but to do the hard work of peace – a work that begins with the hard work of remembering well.

My perception is that Britain has not done this work particularly well. And there are good and not so good reasons for that. Historian, Keith Lowe, in his book *The Savage Continent*, which charts the events of the years immediately following World War Two says that with a population traumatised and an economy devastated by war, with ongoing separations and sufferings, the only reward Britain had for having won was the heroic myth of itself as a valiant overcomer of evil. Who could grudge them that? But the story of Britain as a valiant overcomer of evil also drowned out other less palatable stories as the Empire crumbled and consequences of colonialism became more apparent.

A lack of remembering well has real dangers. When the complexity of history is condensed into one attractive myth, and when that myth supports our self-understanding as the good guys, not humans who are capable of both good and evil, well then we are playing a risky game. Appeals to this myth are hugely attractive and we see them being used by right-wing nationalist groups to create a xenophobia which damages our country through reactionary politics and community tensions. Our own story here at Coventry Cathedral is at risk of being drawn into the same “good guys” narrative – THEY did something BAD to US, but because WE are the GOOD guys, WE reached out in friendship and forgiveness to THEM.

Friends, we must resist this with all that we have. How wise was Provost Howard to refuse to forgive THEM. Ultimately, there is no them to forgive – only one humanity equally able to love and hate, build up and destroy. Provost Howard knew this because he was deeply rooted in a deeper story, a story he remembered every time he stood in his Cathedral and broke bread: all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

This is not to take away from the genuine acts of self-sacrifice made by so many during the wars. My own grandmother spent two and half years separated from my grandfather, rarely hearing from him, not knowing if he was alive or dead. My Papa enlisted knowing full well

the risks of serving in war as his own uncle had been killed in the Battle of the Somme a generation before. God forbid that we should ever dismiss or undervalue the actions of women and men who seek to protect us by serving in our armed forces, or those who support them from home. But there is little point recognising and defeating evil on the global stage, if we do not have the courage to confront it in our own society – or, even more difficult, in our own hearts.

Remembering well is about remembering all of our story, whether as a person or a nation. Creating space for the negative and ambiguous as well as the good. Owning our flaws as well as our And bringing it all to God, who loves us, who forgives us and who will teach us God's better way of justice and peace.