Today on this Remembrance Sunday, we remember. We rightly remember those who have died in war for us. And we rightly give thanks for them. For the part they played in fighting for peace. But today, as we look back so we must also look forward. We look back in order to remember. And we look forward in order to reconcile. So today, we find ourselves in this liminal space of the present – looking back and forward at the same time. Liminal space is often an uncomfortable space to inhabit. It is neither one thing nor another. It requires us to strain our necks as we swivel to look in both directions. So how do we inhabit this liminal space? And what does it mean here for us to do so?

I have been thinking a lot about space lately. About space and reconciliation. About what is needed to create a space, a safe enough space for reconciliation, perhaps something like this liminal space which pulls and pushes us back and forwards. When we remember as Christian people, we hold together in this space past, future and present. God’s kingdom exists in this space – in the liminality of the past, the future and the space we inhabit today. Let me explain.

There is a poem by the 13C Persian poet, Rumi: He wrote, ‘Out there beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing, there is a field. I’ll meet you there.’

In thinking about remembrance and reconciliation, about past and future, about liminal space, I’d like us to imagine this field, the field of meeting beyond wrong or right doing. What do you imagine this field to be like?

When I wrote this sermon last week, I was sitting on a train in Canada between Kingston and Toronto. Outside the train window were field and fields, huge expanses of corn still waiting to be harvested. The field you are thinking about now might be a place of childhood memories; of playing in a meadow; the field might be a field of gold; or it might be a muddy field, shell pocked, fought over, in Vimy Ridge, or Passchendaele, or Arnhem, or Dunkirk or a field of scorched earth in Vietnam; or desert in Afghanistan; Iraq, Syria, Palestine…and now Texas and and and…

Our field could be this desolate wounded place. It could be. It sometimes, it often is. But our field could be a space of growth, abundance, blessing. Whatever our field is like, we need to meet there. To be ready to choose to be vulnerable, to forgive and be forgiven. To love our enemies in our field. Our field, you see, is this liminal space where we can both look back and forwards. Our field is here, it is now. Or it can be, if we decide to meet there. There is a porch out there beyond the great west screen….if you stand on the Queens steps, you see the face of Christ in glory on the tapestry, you see yourself reflected in the west screen with the community of saints and angels doing the reconciliation dance, and you see the ruins reflected too…the whole journey of remembering war, the hope of reconciliation in Christ, and our part in it all. So is this what our field looks like, here in Coventry? The space we can meet the other? Our liminal space, our space of remembering and reconciliation? When we walk out through the west screen just now, let’s take note of our field…what is it like? This space is often not very comfortable…there is even a barrier, a sheep pen, round it. You see, we don’t know who will come in to our space with us. And we can’t choose. We mustn’t choose. We can’t, we mustn’t keep ‘the other’ out. Because it is in this space that we can see the face of Christ- the face of Christ in the face of our enemy.

Today, when we exist in this field, in this liminal space of looking back and remembering, and looking forward to reconciliation, is a time to reassess how we live. How can we, how do we take part in God’s kingdom?
The day after the bombing of this Cathedral, into the arena of tangled metal and emotions walked Provost Howard and said two words, ‘Father, forgive’. Provost Howard gave Coventry and the world a prophetic and radical message. A message still much needed today.

You may remember that this year I spent part of Holy Week and Easter on a peace walk in Northern Iraq, in Kurdistan. About 20 of us from CCN partners in Europe and others walked with local Christians, Muslims and Yazidis. A quarter of people living in Northern Iraq live in Refugee camps, people internally displaced from their own country due to ISIS attacks. Many refugees and aliens in their own land, their own field.

We walked for peace, to proclaim the possibility of peace in that fought over space. On Good Friday we visited a village about 30km from Mosul – Mosul, incidentally is the ancient city of Ninevah - a village that had been destroyed by ISIS, the villagers having all fled or worse. It was a place of destruction, completely devoid of life. Houses were rubble, shops damaged, and the church though still standing had been desecrated, the altar broken and lying in rubble. We could hear Mosul being shelled. So I held a Good Friday service in the desecrated church. We laid candles that we had brought with us in the shape of a cross in front of the destroyed altar and prayed the prayers of Good Friday, the Litany of Reconciliation, for healing, for the end to that conflict, for peace. That day the field indeed seemed desolate. I placed a small cross of nails on the broken altar that had been blessed by Bishop Christopher here on Maundy Thursday. As a sign of Christ’s peace.

On Easter Day we returned to that deserted village and desecrated church. But this time, the bleakness in the Church was transformed. The same rubble was there, the same bullet holes in the walls, the same broken crosses and hacked memorials. But there were people from the surrounding villages, flowers on the altar, children dressed in white, and a packed church there to proclaim the hope of the resurrection, the hope of peace and the possibility of rebuilding. The local Peshmerga, the soldiers came to receive their Easter communion. There were even painted eggs and chocolate after the service. As an aside, people were rather surprised to see a female priest - unknown in those parts – I don’t think I have been asked to bless as many babies and people in wheelchairs ever! The foundation of a rebuilt community was born that day. A space for remembering and for reconciliation. A liminal space, ‘where every tear is wiped away’.

It was in many ways an extraordinary walk in that field. Risky, at times truly dangerous. But a liminal space – where we existed caught between the past and the future. Our necks straining, trying to look in both directions as we walked. As we left that church in the destroyed village, we had to walk carefully back to the bus for fear of unexploded ordinances just off the path.

Despair to hope, hostility to peace, conflict to reconciliation.

I preached at a church in Wuppertal in Germany a month or so ago where the Barmen Declaration was signed in the 1934. The Barmen Declaration was a response from the confessing churches in Germany against the rise of Nazi ideology, and the subordination of the Church to the State.

Today, in 2017, what can we as the church do, what should we do, to respond and act for justice, for hope, for reconciliation? In today’s world where white gated communities trump cardboard shacks. Where Europe is again being torn apart. Where the colour of your skin, or your gender, or your ethnicity or your sexuality can deny you justice. Where your fields have been appropriated, or taken away like those of the Canadian indigenous peoples and countless others around the world.

Is it time for a new Barmen Declaration? A Coventry Declaration of Reconciliation even?
Can we as the Church, as Coventry Cathedral speak out to our nation, our communities, ourselves? We need to courageously inhabit this liminal, reconciling space, steering our communities toward peace and reconciliation and away from conflict and division. We truly need to inhabit this liminal space however uncomfortable it may be. In his Son’s death and resurrection, in his body and blood, God enables us to inhabit his blessings. That is why and how we inhabit this space we find ourselves in today, how we as committed disciples of Christ can tilt our communities towards reconciliation. That is how and why we live with difference and celebrate diversity. That is how we live with the gift of blessing we receive as peacemakers. That is how and why we live the gospel, the gospel of reconciliation.

What will we write into our Coventry Declaration of Reconciliation today? Let’s think about it together as we look forwards, and as we remember on this Remembrance Sunday. And then let’s write it! Maybe as a good starting point we would do well to follow in Provost Howard’s footsteps in 1940 when he said, ‘Let’s build a more Christ-childlike and kinder world.’ So as we look back and forward today, as we remember and reconcile, let us indeed build a more Christ child like and kinder world, because nothing much else seems to be working. And lets then meet in the field, where we find Christ in the face of the other. Amen.