

"Lest We Forget"

Dear Friends

November is the Church's month of remembering, at least in England. It begins with the season of All-hallowtide, which encompasses All Saints' Eve, which flows into All Saints' Day when the church remembers those whose lives of service to God have stood out as an inspiration to others. The following day is All Souls' Day, sometimes known as "The Commemoration of the Faithful Departed". On that day, we remember those known more personally to each of us. The eleventh of November is Remembrance Day, a chance to remember the tragedy of the First World War and how it changed our attitude to war from being a normal part of human life to being something we should do all we can to avoid. And the second Sunday of November is Remembrance Sunday, when we remember those British and Commonwealth service-men and -women (military and civilian) who died in both world wars and conflicts since.

Remembering is important because it is essential to our humanity. I am reading a book at the moment which talks about how telling stories is what distinguishes us from other animals: stories that made sure important lifesaving information was not forgotten - which foods were poisonous, how to defeat a mammoth, what lies beyond the river... "Twelfth of May, Stow Fair Day, Sow your kidney beans today" may be interesting folklore to us today, but such proverbs meant the difference between survival and starvation to our ancestors.

Remembering is important because it is so easy to forget! A few years ago I was having a tough time mentally. Without any particular reason I could think of, I just felt empty. So on the advice of a friend I decided to spend some time talking about this with a counsellor. It wasn't always the easiest experience, but one thing that particularly struck me was that at the end of most sessions I had remembered a piece of advice which used to be second nature but which over time I had simply forgotten. It is important sometimes to slow down and make sure we haven't forgotten something important.

Finally, remembering is important because it is a way of showing our love. We all forget. I sometimes have to stop and make sure I am calling my sons by their correct names, and I'm sure I'm not the only one! Forgetfulness is human and nothing to feel guilty or ashamed about. Which makes it all the more precious when we do remember.

One of the most meaningful moments of my year is reading out the names of those from all over the world whose bodies are buried in the churchyard of All Saints in Yatesbury. Those airmen, mostly very young, died far from their homes. In the chaos of war, there was no way they could be returned to their families for burial. Which makes it the most incredible privilege once a year not only to express our gratitude for their sacrifice, but to do the remembering on behalf of those same families. I'm sure it's a similar experience for those of you who have visited the War Graves over on the Somme or Ypres battlefields.

Christians disagree with each other about many things, but at the centre of all forms of church, from the most formal and elaborate to the most relaxed and casual, is the simple act of remembering.

Every week I stand at the front of one or more of my congregations and bless the bread and wine, recalling the command of Jesus to "do this in remembrance of me." We remember Jesus' death because it is essential to our Christianity. We remember him, so that we don't forget what it cost him. And we remember, because by doing so we can show him our love.

Whoever or whatever you will be remembering this month, may you have a blessed Rememberingtide.