

**A Podcast for North Coventry Group – 8 November 2020
- Twenty-Third Sunday after Pentecost, and Remembrance Sunday, 2020'**

Introductory Musicⁱ – *Solemn Melody*, by Sir Henry Walford Davies
performed by the Band of the Irish Guards
from the album *Music for Remembrance*

Hello and welcome to a podcast for and from the North Coventry Group of United Reformed Churches. This has been prepared for the 8 November, the twenty-third Sunday after Pentecost and Remembrance Sunday, 2020.

Details of music and sources are in the online transcript, and I would like to thank Erica, Ella and Rachel for their help in preparing this week's edition.

As we prepare this week's edition of the Podcast, it is not clear exactly how the national Remembrance Sunday ceremony at the Cenotaph in Whitehall will be enacted. Certainly there will not be crowds of thousands watching from the pavements as I did three years ago, nor the ranks of armed forces standing shoulder to shoulder, the array of foreign diplomats, domestic politicians and members of the Royal Family crowded around the monument. The march-past of further thousands of veteran soldiers and family members will not take place.

We have introduced the podcast with some of the traditional selection of music from different parts of the United Kingdom that has been played on each such occasion since 1930, as everyone gathers before Big Ben strikes the hour.

Here, as **we** – in a sense – gather, is a further short selection.

Music: *Isle Of Beauty, David Of The White Rock, Off In The Stilly Night*
performed by the Band of the Irish Guards
from the album *Music for Remembrance*

Call to Worship: **Isaiah 2.2-4**

Words from the book of the prophet Isaiah

In the last days the mountain of the Lord's temple will be established as the highest of the mountains; it will be exalted above the hills, and all nations will stream to it. Many peoples will come and say, 'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the temple of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths.' The law will go out from Zion, the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war any more.

I have wondered how to incorporate a time of silence into a podcast without simply leaving a gap. The two-minutes' silence is in any case different for everyone who observes it.

In 2017 I spent a sabbatical period of three months considering the topic of Remembrance, visiting various relevant sites and arranging a number of different, relevant experiences in different parts of the country. As I said, I went to the Cenotaph. There I was impressed that printed in the service sheet, given out to anyone who would take one, there was a list of what might be appropriate 'subjects for thought and prayer' during the two minutes. I was impressed that they were not jingoistic or nationalist in tone. And I was impressed that you could make of them what you wished:

Here they are:

*We remember those who made the great sacrifice during the two World Wars;
We remember those who have given their lives in the service of their country in other conflicts;
We pray for those who suffer at this time;
We pray for those who have been bereaved;
We pray for peace;
We pray that we may be worthy of the sacrifice made on our behalf.*

In a crowded street in a great city, in our own Memorial Park where usually there would be quite a number gathered on Remembrance Day, even in any of our own churches, a silence is never silent. But it is a time set apart for reflection, and here is our time.

The two minutes' silence as recorded in Whitehall by the BBC, on the 12th November 2017. Big Ben strikes the hour.

[The 'silence'; Big Ben strikes the hour as a gun is fired. Another gun marks the completion of two minutes; the *Last Post* is played.]

Hymn: *O God our help in ages past* (by Isaac Watts, based on Psalm 90)
 sung by the Choir of The Royal Naval College Chapel Greenwich, with
 the Congregation of The Royal Naval College Chapel Greenwich, its
 Brass Ensemble and Gordon St. John Clarke
 from the album *20 Favourite Hymns*
 from the *Royal Naval College Chapel, Greenwich*.

*O God, our help in ages past,
our hope for years to come,
our shelter from the stormy blast,
and our eternal home;*

*A thousand ages in thy sight
are like an evening gone,
short as the watch that ends the night
before the rising sun.*

*Under the shadow of thy throne
Thy saints have dwelt secure;
Sufficient is thine arm alone,
And our defence is sure.*

*Time, like an ever-rolling stream,
bears all its sons away;
they fly forgotten, as a dream
dies at the opening day.*

*Before the hills in order stood,
or earth received her frame,
from everlasting thou art God,
to endless years the same.*

*O God, our help in ages past,
our hope for years to come,
be thou our guard while troubles last,
and our eternal home.*

If you have watched the Cenotaph ceremony in person or on television you will probably know the tradition. Despite the focus on the people attending, laying wreaths and marching past, nevertheless at the heart of the ceremony is a short act of worship. Always the same and unlike this podcast it contains no reflection on the Word of God. There is no scripture read, although the Old Testament is represented by the version of Psalm 90 that we have just heard.

And there are these prayers:

Prayers

Let us pray

O Almighty God, grant, we beseech thee, that we who here do honour to the memory of those who have died in the service of their country and of the Crown, may be so inspired by the spirit of their love and fortitude that, forgetting all selfish and unworthy motives, we may live only to thy glory and to the service of mankind through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Teach us, good Lord, to serve thee as thou deservest;
to give and not to count the cost;
to fight and not to heed the wounds;
to toil and not to seek for rest;
to labour and not to ask for any reward, save that of
knowing that we do thy will;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen

All present join in the Lord's Prayer, as we do, using the words that Jesus taught:

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in Heaven. Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Remembrance Thoughts

There is no way to describe much of my Remembrance-themed sabbatical journey here. My written report, lots of pictures and some other links are included on a special website I put together at the time - I shall include a link to the site with the podcast material for this week.

But I want to mention two mothers that I encountered or met again on my journey. The first was my own great-grandmother Maggie, whose Armistice Day letter to her son Willie – serving in Salonica, in Greece – is a wonderful mixture of naivety, relief and concern for her family. It brings home the ordinariness of most of those who greeted the end of the First World War:

My dear Willie

This is a wonder-full day. Peace has been signed and we all feel as if Wars were at an end. And we can't help thinking of the friends we will never see again so that joy and sorrow mingles.

When will Willie get home we are all saying and I have a parcel ready to send and I don't know whether to post it or not.

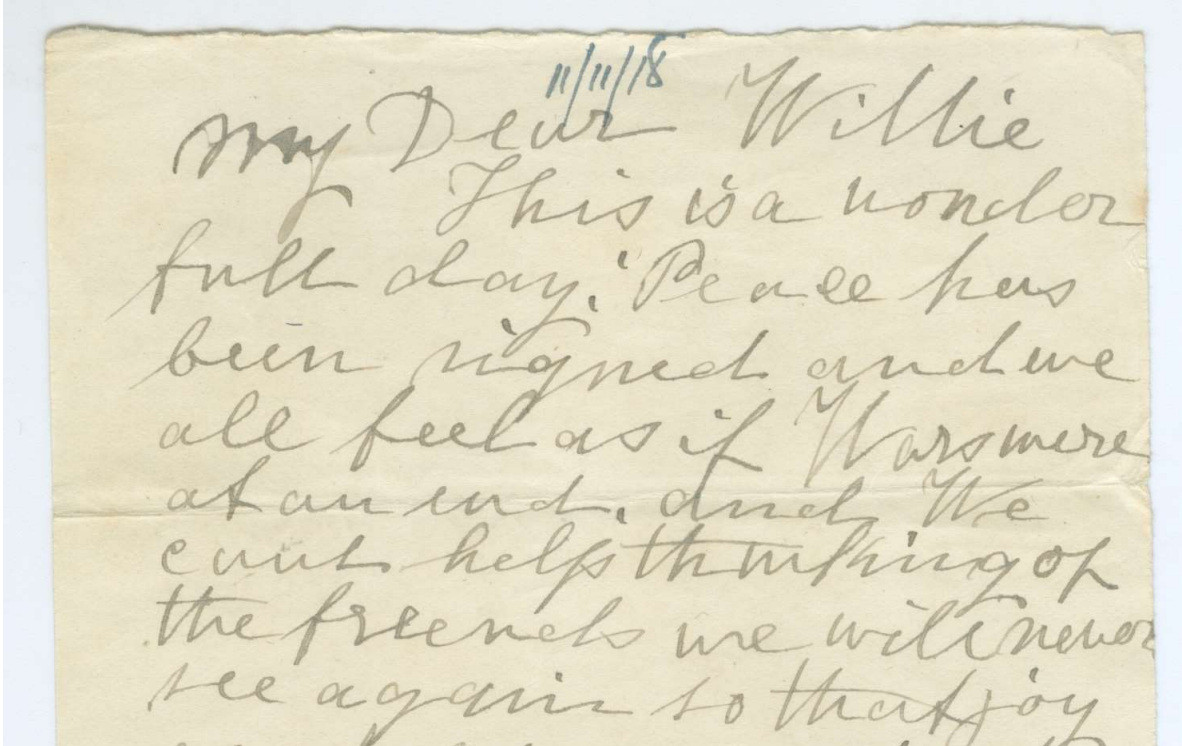
Aleck is hear just now he has had the influenza pretty bad and he has 7 days leave. He is looking better now and is at Greenock seeing John today. James came home yesterday morning and was up with little Betty. James looks well he does not know what he is likely to do yet.

I hear Willie Young has been wounded and is in London. Jack McTaggart has been wounded but he's getting better.

O Willie what a blessing that the war is ended. How many poor fellows are suffering and I do hope the Kaiser and all his helpers get their deserts.

Jenny is going some day this week to France to the Womens Hospital Scottish near Paris. She wanted a change she has got a good outfit from them and is well fitted out with everything she has signed on for a year. I hope she will arrive safe and like the work.

We are all as usual, Father still keeps well I hope this finds you well.
Love from Mother.



Maggie was over optimistic, and it was the following March before Willie came home. But he survived, as did all three of the sons of the family who had served in the forces, although their cousin was not so fortunate and died as part of the occupying forces in Cologne in 1919 – from the flu pandemic, a sobering thought for these times.

Music: *Sunset*
performed by the Band of the Irish Guards
from the album *Music for Remembrance*

I mentioned two mothers, and the other was a German artist called Käthe Kollwitz.

She was an art teacher in Berlin, where her husband worked as a doctor among the poor. She, and presumably he, had a passion for social justice. She specialised in print-making and during her life time produced a number of series of prints which focused on the plight of ordinary people caught up in conflict. This predated the War, although her life and work were each to become centred on the War in quite dramatic and tragic fashion.

One of Kollwitz' sons was under-age when the war broke out, and his father denied him the permission he needed to join up. Käthe persuaded the doctor to allow this son, Peter, to go to the War. He was killed in action just ten days after leaving home.

Imagine the grief. Imagine the guilt.

Again I have to refer you to my sabbatical report for more information and examples of her work, but I want to share our experience of visiting the German cemetery in Belgium where Peter's remains, and those of over 25,000 of his comrades are buried in a grove of German oak trees.

The cemetery is made special by the siting of two statues by Kollwitz that in the years after the War she was finally able to create as a memorial, symbolising the grief of parents for the child they had not been able to protect. And also the grief of a nation which had not been able to keep its children safe and well. Erica reflected on her own thoughts:

...we got up close to the statues, where the pain of the parents is palpable. Suddenly all the names, not just Peter Kollwitz, came to life and assumed individual importance. The parents are united in grief, but also isolated and divided by it.

Karl Kollwitz looks out over the graves of their son and all his comrades, staring out into the distance. You can see in his face that he is devastated by his loss. But it is a cold, hard grief that he shows.

And alongside him, but out of touching reach, is his wife. The guilt she feels for her part in the sequence of events that led to Peter's death is so evident in her face and her attitude of penitence. And I just reached out and pressed my hand to her cold stone hand, one mother to another across a century. Because of Bill's interest in her I have seen a lot of her art, but in that moment I suddenly felt that I understood how Peter's death had blighted and shaped the rest of her life and work. Words passed between us and I prayed.



'Give us peace on earth; Lord, give us peace.' *Dona nobis pacem in terra.*

Music:

Dona nobis pacem in terra. Dona nobis pacem domine.
sung by the Karlstad Kammarkor, from Karlstad in Sweden
from the album *Så Som På Jorden. Sånger Från Iona*

Scriptureⁱⁱ: Matthew 5:38-48

A reading from Matthew's Gospel, in chapter 5, verses 38 to 48

³⁸ 'You have heard that it was said, "Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth." ³⁹ But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. ⁴⁰ And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. ⁴¹ If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles. ⁴² Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.

⁴³ 'You have heard that it was said, "Love your neighbour and hate your enemy." ⁴⁴ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵ that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. ⁴⁶ If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? ⁴⁷ And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? ⁴⁸ Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Reflection

If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also.

Jesus seems to promote a passive response to a bully, but when people can take no more abuse, they themselves turn to violence. And self-defence **is** a defence, in law. When nations can no longer put up with what they deem to be inappropriate behaviour on the part of their neighbours, then the last straw drifts down onto the camel's back and even the most peaceable of peoples may turn to military means to impose or reimpose their idea of what is right.

Sometimes we call this 'peace-keeping', and I happen to believe rightly so. Sometimes it is to try to deal with a blatant injustice, and in the end I have to say I would support this too.

A number of generations of my family have accepted the call to serve their country; this was in both World Wars. I could also bore you about one great-great grandfather who was shot in the leg at Waterloo and another who managed to be promoted and then demoted again twice during service in the Crimea and India in the 1850s.

The same Young family that offered up three sons to serve in the First World War were pillars of the church. In their case the United Free Church, one of Scotland's various strands of Presbyterianism. But how could they, how can we reconcile this with the clear injunction from Christ:

I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven?

It's a challenge, and one of those that seem to queue up to confront us, if we take every saying of Jesus in scripture and try to apply it unfiltered and in its entirety to our lives today. We have none of us sold our belongings and given everything to the poor. Very few Christians would want to turn their backs on family and friends in order to follow Jesus. Looking at this part of the Sermon on the Mount, few indeed would be likely to stand and calmly accept a mugging on the basis that non-retaliation is a command of Jesus.

But finding a **better** way **is** the way that we are invited to seek. And by **not** simply mirroring the violence of others, whether that is expressed physically or not, we would hope and pray

that we can lead the way to a better place. John Proctor, commenting on this passage, suggests that we should have two motives in promoting this... asymmetric approach:

The first is to be like God. God sends good weather to just and unjust people alike. The rain and the sunshine fall on every garden in town, not only on the land that belongs to righteous people. Followers of Jesus should be complete and open in their care, just as God is.

The second motive is to be different. There is nothing unusual [or distinctive] about loving our friends and greeting those who are good to us. Everybody does that. Christians will be salt and light in the world only if they show a better way, if they extend their love and care to people they do not like.¹

In the book of Revelation there is a vision of what perfect peace will be like:

...the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.

The 'nations' are the non-Jews. Everybody else. Everyone you would consider to be on the opposing side, most of the time. In time of war, the opposing side was called the enemy. But in this vision of the perfect future they will be on our side, on God's side.

It makes no sense and indeed makes a nonsense of the faith we profess if, because of who was on the other side in two World Wars, our neighbours on this Remembrance Day appear not to be the same neighbours we pray for and ask for grace to love, on the other 51 Sundays in the year.

Prayers of Intercession

*[Dona nobis pacem in terra, dona nobis pacem domine: 'Give us peace on earth; give us peace, Lord' is sung by the Wild Goose Worship Group of the Iona Community and taken from their album *Heaven shall not wait.*]*

Dona nobis pacem in terra, dona nobis pacem domine

Lord God, on this day we remember past and present conflicts. We pray for those who are troubled, affected, bereaved, injured, made homeless and put daily at risk by the range of conflict in our world. We pray that we and our leaders may all use the resources we have to bring about peace, to reconcile those who are on opposing sides. In memory of those who have suffered and died in the past, for the good of ourselves and our neighbours and generations yet to come.

Dona nobis pacem in terra, dona nobis pacem domine

Lord God, our own thoughts this weekend may be focused on a different struggle. The fight against an invisible virus, an unseen foe which nevertheless is bringing death and suffering to our fellow members of the human family. In our city, across the nation and across the world. We pray for those who are fighting this disease, those seeking ways to bring it under

¹ Proctor, John *Matthew; the People's Bible Commentary* 2001. Oxford: The Bible Reading Fellowship, p51.

some sort of control, those whose vocations put them in danger as real as that faced in battle.

Dona nobis pacem in terra, dona nobis pacem domine

As we contain ourselves within our homes, locked down once again, be with those who suffer in spirit, through isolation, through loneliness, facing the challenges of winter, darkness, cold. May we be alert to opportunities to share your love through our own resources of time, mobility and money.

In all of this may we be identified and identifiable as disciples of Christ by our actions as well as our words. Send us all your peace and your love through your Spirit

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Dona nobis pacem in terra, dona nobis pacem domine

Hymn: *Lead us, heavenly Father, lead us*, words by James Edmeston (1791 -1867) sung by the Choir of The Royal Naval College Chapel Greenwich, with the Congregation of The Royal Naval College Chapel Greenwich, its Brass Ensemble and Gordon St. John Clarke from the album *20 Favourite Hymns from the Royal Naval College Chapel, Greenwich*.

Lead us, heavenly Father, lead us
o'er the world's tempestuous sea;
guard us, guide us, keep us, feed us,
for we have no help but thee;
yet possessing every blessing,
if our God our Father be.

Saviour, breathe forgiveness o'er us:
all our weakness thou dost know;
thou didst tread this earth before us,
thou didst feel its keenest woe;
lone and dreary, faint and weary,
through the desert thou didst go.

Spirit of our God, descending,
fill our hearts with heavenly joy,
love with every passion blending,
pleasure that can never cloy:
thus provided, pardoned, guided,
nothing can our peace destroy.

Blessing

In all we do, may our chief remembrance be of the sacrifice of Jesus, and our response be an active striving for justice and peace in God's world.

And may the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, be with us all today and for ever. Amen

Our closing music for this podcast about Remembrance is, in a sense, about remembering. In the news last month was an elderly musician, Paul Harvey, who despite suffering from dementia can still play and compose at the piano. An extempore piece of his based on four notes nominated by his son Nick has been orchestrated and recorded. *Four notes – Paul's tune*.

Music: *Four notes – Paul’s tune*, composed by Paul Harvey performed by Paul Harvey on piano and The BBC Philharmonic Orchestra in lockdown, available online as a single, with proceeds going to The Alzheimer's Society and Music for Dementia.

Thank you for listening to our podcast.

We always welcome feedback, suggestions, and volunteers to read, including anyone who would like to take part in an online festival of carols and readings at Christmas-time. A full archive of all of our podcasts since March is on our website [<https://revdbill.uk>].

Credits

The *Solemn Melody*, by Sir Henry Walford Davies, the traditional tunes *Isle Of Beauty*, *David Of The White Rock*, and *Off In The Stilly Night*, and *Sunset* were performed by the Band of the Irish Guards and taken from the album *Music for Remembrance*

The hymns *O God our help in ages past* and *Lead us, heavenly Father, lead us* were sung by the Choir of The Royal Naval College Chapel Greenwich, with the Congregation of The Royal Naval College Chapel Greenwich, its Brass Ensemble and Gordon St. John Clarke, from the album *20 Favourite Hymns from the Royal Naval College Chapel, Greenwich*.

Dona nobis pacem in terra, in a setting by John Bell, was sung first by the the Karlstad Kammarkor, from Karlstad in Sweden, from the album *Så Som På Jorden. Sångar Från Iona* and then by the Wild Goose Worship Group of the Iona Community and taken from their album *Heaven shall not wait*.

And *Four notes – Paul’s tune*, composed by Paul Harvey, was performed by Paul Harvey on piano with the BBC Philharmonic Orchestra in lockdown; this music is available online as a single, with proceeds going to The Alzheimer's Society and Music for Dementia.

ⁱ All music included in this podcast is made available for download under the terms of the PRS for Music Limited Online Music Licence number LE-0019067

ⁱⁱ Bible quotations are all taken from the New International Version, Anglicised Edition