

PERSONAL ACT OF REMEMBRANCE

Today, we remember those who have served and died in war. We pray for peace and for those who work for peace; for victims of conflict; civilians, refugees and all who are brutalised by violence; for those who have been left physically maimed as well as damaged mentally and emotionally.

PSALM 46

¹God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

²Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change, though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea;

³though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble with its tumult.

⁶The nations are in an uproar, the kingdoms totter; he utters his voice, the earth melts.

⁷The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge.

⁸Come, behold the works of the LORD; see what desolations he has brought on the earth.

⁹He makes wars cease to the end of the earth; he breaks the bow, and shatters the spear; he burns the shields with fire.

¹⁰'Be still, and know that I am God! I am exalted among the nations, I am exalted in the earth.'

¹¹The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge.

PRAYER OF PRAISE

Gracious God, we heard you even in the sea of disorder and the darkness of the void crying, "Light and life become" and all creation was begun. We praise you.

Redeeming God, we heard you even in the sins of destruction and the night time of sadness, crying "Enough! Here is my Son; love and hope for the future." We praise you.

Inspiring God, we heard you even in the silence of sorrow and the anguish of pain, crying, "If God be for us, who can be against us!" We praise you.

COMMEMORATION

We remember in silence, before God, all those who have suffered and are suffering; all those who have given and are giving their lives in the cause of freedom; all those who have been scarred physically and emotionally and those who are being so affected today.

"They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old.

Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.

At the going down of the sun and in the morning

We will remember them.

WE WILL REMEMBER THEM."

[2 minutes silence]

PRAYER OF INTERCESSION AND FOR PEACE

Father of mercies and God of comfort, we pray this day for all those who continue to suffer because of war: widows, orphans and all who are bereaved; those physically damaged as well as those who have been shell shocked and traumatised; refugees without home, work or country. Grant to them all your healing and strength, your help and consolation, and use us in this service.

God of hosts, yours is the battle against evil, yours is the victory over death. We come to you with memories of war and death, with scars of victory and defeat. By your Son, Jesus Christ, who bears the scars of his victory won not for himself but for others, grant us this day healing for the past, and resolution for the future. So, may your world discover and know that peace which is your purpose for us all; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen

PSALM 67 verses 1 – 7

¹May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face to shine upon us,

²that your way may be known upon earth, your saving power among all nations.

³Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you.

⁴Let the nations be glad and sing for joy, for you judge the peoples with equity and guide the nations upon earth.

⁵Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you.

⁶The earth has yielded its increase; God, our God, has blessed us.

⁷May God continue to bless us; let all the ends of the earth revere him.

1 SAMUEL chapter 6 verse 19 to chapter 7 verse 12

¹⁹The descendants of Jeconiah did not rejoice with the people of Beth-shemesh when they greeted the ark of the LORD; and he killed seventy men of them. The people mourned because the LORD had made a great slaughter among the people. ²⁰Then the people of Beth-shemesh said, 'Who is able to stand before the LORD, this holy God? To whom shall he go so that we may be rid of him?' ²¹So they sent messengers to the inhabitants of Kiriath-jearim, saying, 'The Philistines have returned the ark of the LORD. Come down and take it up to you.'

⁷ ¹And the people of Kiriath-jearim came and took up the ark of the LORD, and brought it to the house of Abinadab on the hill. They consecrated his son, Eleazar, to have charge of the ark of the LORD.

²From the day that the ark was lodged at Kiriath-jearim, a long time passed, some twenty years, and all the house of Israel lamented after the LORD.

³Then Samuel said to all the house of Israel, 'If you are returning to the LORD with all your heart, then put away the foreign gods and the Astartes from among you. Direct your heart to the LORD, and serve him only, and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines.' ⁴So Israel put away the Baals and the Astartes, and they served the LORD only.

⁵Then Samuel said, 'Gather all Israel at Mizpah, and I will pray to the LORD for you.' ⁶So they gathered at Mizpah, and drew water and poured it out before the LORD. They fasted that day, and said, 'We have sinned against the LORD.' And Samuel judged the people of Israel at Mizpah.

⁷When the Philistines heard that the people of Israel had gathered at Mizpah, the lords of the Philistines went up against Israel. And when the people of Israel heard of it they were afraid of the Philistines. ⁸The people of Israel said to Samuel, 'Do not cease to cry out to the LORD our God for us, and pray that he may save us from the hand of the Philistines.'⁹ So Samuel took a sucking lamb and offered it as a whole burnt-offering to the LORD; Samuel cried out to the LORD for Israel, and the LORD answered him. ¹⁰As Samuel was offering up the burnt-offering, the Philistines drew near to attack Israel; but the LORD thundered with a mighty voice that day against the Philistines and threw them into confusion; and they were routed before Israel. ¹¹And the men of Israel went out of Mizpah and pursued the Philistines, and struck them down as far as beyond Beth-car.

¹²Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Jeshanah, and named it Ebenezer; for he said, 'Thus far the LORD has helped us.'

“THE LORD HAS HELPED US”

READING: *1 Samuel chapter 6 verse 19 – chapter 7 verse 12*

It is that time of the year when, once again, we are reminded of the sacrifices made by many in the cause of freedom. We are not glorifying war, nor are we justifying involvement in the conflicts of today – but rather we look back and remember with thanks, those who gave, and still give today, without thought for themselves, in the service of freedom for humanity. In doing so we also stand alongside families who find this day very difficult, especially those who have lost loved ones in the arenas of conflict around the world. In this 75th anniversary of the end of last major war to pitch nations against nations, we should continue to pray for peace in our world and remember with thanks those who have struggled, fought, and died in the cause of freedom.

With all that is happening in today’s world, the political and social unrest, the continuing uncertainty of COVID and the various ways it has affected and changed lives, families and communities, it is good to remember with thanks, the freedom we have – even if somewhat restricted. Yes, there are things wrong in society, with governments, with systems. However, if we look around the world, at countries where your faith or my faith might be deemed illegal or blasphemous, where speaking out is grounds for imprisonment, where citizens are not allowed to vote, where standing up against rulers is grounds for execution, our country is not such a bad place to live. So, on days like today, we take time to remember why.

The Old Testament recalls many battles and wars, part of the reason why some do not like reading it. In our main reading from **1 Samuel** we find the Israelites caught in a long drawn out war with the Philistines. The Israelites were growing tired and despondent. But the nation had a godly leader in Samuel. He was not the king, but a judge appointed by God to help the people remain faithful to the Lord. Samuel called on the people to revive their affections for the one true God, to get rid of their back-up plans, their idols, those things they would pray to when other things didn’t seem to work. He also instructed them to come back to God, to repent, to admit fault and blame. The people, led by Samuel, gathered at a place called Mizpah, where they sacrificed animals to the Lord, as a symbol of restoring their faith in Him. Meanwhile, the Philistines heard that the people were gathering at Mizpah, and they thought that a sneak attack would be a great idea. But God had other plans. The Lord fought for His people that day, and threw the enemy into confusion. The Israelite army thoroughly routed the enemy Philistines that day.

Samuel wanted the people to remember that day, the day that God fought for His people. So Samuel took a stone, a single stone, and set it up where the army had won the battle. He called it Ebenezer, which means “stone of help”. It was meant to help people remember what God had done for them. Samuel himself said, “Thus far the Lord has helped us.” The King James puts it this way: “Hitherto hath the Lord helped us.” Hitherto.

Robert Robinson penned the lyrics to the hymn “Come thou Fount of every blessing” and in his 2nd verse says this: “Here I raise mine Ebenezer; hither by thy help I’m come; And I hope, by thy good pleasure, safely to arrive at home.” The word “hither” really means “so far”. The songwriter and Samuel both looked back at where they had been, where they had come from, and realized that the Lord had been with them. They got to the place where they were, not by themselves, but because the Lord had brought them this far.

A couple of years ago, I decided that it was about time that I climbed Pen y Fan. My son Rhys had done it. Many people I knew had done it and I thought that it was about time I did it. Every time I drove past it, I thought “one day”. So “one day” had arrived and I duly equipped myself and set off. The path I chose looked ok from road, but turned out to be the wrong route for a beginner. However, finally arriving at the top, I took in the wonderful view of God’s creative handiwork, being thankful for what He had made and also for the strength to get there to see it. The road had been hard and long, but I got there. Remembering where these Israelites had been, and what had happened, and how things were now, caused them to be thankful to God.

If the truth were told, we'd all admit to being forgetful at times. Not just about trivial things, but about real consequential things. **Psalm 103** tells us not to forget all His benefits, all the things that God has done for us. He's given us life and breath, health and strength. He's provided for us forgiveness and clean consciences. He's promised us eternal life and hope in the midst of death. Our lives have purpose and meaning because of what the Lord has done. The Bible says that everything – from good to bad, from fair to middling – works together for the good of those who love God. That even the worst of tragedies, God who can bring something beautiful out of them. In the horrors of war, there have been many stories of hope, of unexpected kindness. In these days of COVID, there have been many stories which have instilled hope, faith in society and maybe, trust that God has not deserted us.

But we forget so easily. We lose sight, we lose hope, we lose faith. We go about our daily existences, forgetting all the wonderful things God has done, forgetting all the great stuff ahead. No wonder that over and over in the Bible, someone builds an altar of stones, from Noah to Moses, from Jacob to Elijah, for the purpose of remembering what God had done for them. One stone upon another, laid carefully to withstand the elements, to serve as a reminder for generations that God had been kind to them.

We need more Ebenezers. Life gets rough sometimes, and we forget where we have come from. We need to remember that the Lord is still our shepherd. We need to remember that God will never leave us or forsake us. We need the company of other people who love the Lord, to remind us that we are not alone on our journey. One day, soon, we will worship together to praise God and remember His limitless blessings, and our praise should be limitless. Grave headstones, plaques on walls help us remember. Samuel's Ebenezer served the same purpose. Years later, people would look at that stone and be reminded of God's love for them, and commitment to them, and they would be thankful. Thank you, Lord, for your watching over us. Thank you, Lord, for your help and your care. Thank you, Lord, that you did not abandon us to our enemies. That's why we have the cross – to remind us of who we were, who we are, where we're going, who made it happen, and how He did it. The cross is more than a nice piece of jewellery; it is an Ebenezer, reminding us of what someone did for us, to set us free.

In the same way, the national Cenotaph and local memorials are a reminder; our poppies are a reminder of sacrifices in the cause of freedom. After all, what do we say? Lest we forget. We never want to forget what someone has done for us. It's easy enough, I think. Unless the hurt is still fresh or we are into genealogy, do we remember during the rest of the year the events of today? At other times in the year, do we remember the sacrifices of the First World War, or the Second World War, or the events of Northern Ireland, of the Falklands, of Afghanistan, the Gulf War, the fight militant Islamists or any of the other conflicts. This is why we need a cenotaph: to remember the sacrifice made by others so that the world would be free. Military personnel still fight for freedom and serve as peacekeepers across the globe. The cenotaph reminds us that even today, Britons / Welshmen and women lose their lives to fight for the freedom and well-being of others. Even though the stone etched with markings contains the names of those long since gone, the list of Britons who have given their lives for their country and for others, even to the point of making the ultimate sacrifice. A list that continues to grow.

It is good to remember. Lest we forget the sacrifices made by those we did not know for those they did not know. Lest we forget how men and women of all ages, backgrounds, ethnicities, laid down their lives for the lives of others. Lest we forget those who made careers of serving in our armed forces, giving many years for the sake of peace and safety. Lest we forget those who came and went on this earth with no family, no one to write their names in a family tree, no one to preserve their legacy for years to come. As we remember here this morning, of the stone memorial just outside St Luke's, our Ebenezer, our reminder made of stone that we have received help, let us also remember the cross, another Ebenezer, a reminder that we have received help and life itself from our God.