

## Remembering

9 11 14

Almighty Father,  
whose will is to restore all things  
in your beloved Son, the king of all:  
govern the hearts and minds of those in authority,  
and bring the families of nations,  
divided by the ravages of sin  
to be subject to his just and gentle rule

Our text this morning is taken from Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians chapter 4 and the end of verse 17, one of the great statements of our belief as Christians in life after death: '**. . . we will be with the Lord forever.**'

I must be getting old. It's not that I'm less fit; it's not that I'm more fat; but it's the number of folk that I know who are ill, in pain, who are slowly or suddenly dying. Not good – but today and over the past week and over the past months since around the beginning of August, we have been remembering the centenary of the First World War and all that the Great War, the war to end all wars, entailed.

It is good to remember, right and proper to pay due respect and honour to those who have gone before us. You have only to look around our church and read the brass and marble plaques, read the inscriptions on some of the stained glass, pick up the odd kneeler and read in whose name the work is dedicated, to see the

number of folk whose memory is persevered in the body and fabric of our church, the story of this place for nearly a century and half.

But since today is Remembrance Sunday, I'd like briefly to focus on the memory of the First World War. Like David Norris, I used to teach English and the poetry of the First World War. Now if you had to choose just one poem to read at this service about that conflict, which one would you choose? Me? I've chosen one by Rupert Brooke which I'm sure you'll know:

### The Soldier

'If I should die, think only this of me :

That there's some corner of a foreign field  
That is forever England. There shall be  
In that rich earth a richer dust concealed ;  
A dust whom England bore, shaped, made aware,  
Gave once, her flowers to love, her ways to roam,  
A body of England's, breathing English air,  
Washed by the rivers, blest by suns of home.

And think, this heart, all evil shed away,

A pulse in the eternal mind, no less  
Gives somewhere back the thoughts by England given ;  
Her sights and sounds ; dreams happy as her day ;  
And laughter, learnt of friends ; and gentleness,  
In hearts at peace, under an English heaven.

It makes me want to cry, even after all these years. It is a beautiful expression of an appreciation of being English: four times he mentions 'England'; twice 'English' – the effect in a fourteen line sonnet is to root the poem in the land from which many of us come.

The first eight lines are a simple statement of the fact of war: that if you are a soldier chances are you will be killed in battle or die as a consequence of serving your country – on the way to Gallipoli, Rupert Brooke died of a blood poisoning on Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> April (St George's Day) 1915 and was buried on the Greek Island of Scyros in a grave surrounded by grey-green olives, one of which was weeping above his head and on the ground, bluish-grey flowering sage.

The second six lines are suggestion of immortality, of life after death. Purified, at one with God, a mirror reflecting all that has been good in his life, now as a blessing to those who come after.

And that, my friends, is the message of Remembrance Sunday. The fact of the awful cost of war in terms of life lost and lives damaged. The thought of the sacrifice fighting entails. The sense that love of country can be a force for good.

I have spoken in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

*Preached at the Eucharist  
St Bartholomew's, Dinard  
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