

## REMEMBRANCE SUNDAY 2016

“Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. .. and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” (Genesis 12.1)

There are very few people alive today who were alive in the First World War. To have lived during the time of the Second World War you must be at least 70 years old. The majority of the population of England has no memory of either war. Although we have had horrific wars and fighting since World War 2 there are some who regard Remembrance Sunday with total disinterest. What happened before they were born, they feel, is of no concern of theirs. And there are others who regard Remembrance Sunday with a deep cynicism; they dismiss it as a jingoistic gloating over an old victory.

I regard both these objections as unfair. I would say to any who sympathise with these objections that it is the things which happened before you were born that determined the kind of world into which you were born, and in which you grew up. I agree that ‘jingoistic gloating over an old victory’ is unworthy and indeed positively harmful. But that is not what the right observance of Remembrance Sunday is about. The right observance is the remembrance of those who died, and the rededication of those who live – and that includes all of us.

‘Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.’ In that text from the story of Abraham there is both a command and a promise. And in that command and promise Abraham thousands of years ago, the fallen in the world wars, and you and I today are linked.

‘Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you’ That’s the command. It was given quite literally to Abraham. It was given to the fallen of the wars in a somewhat similar way, and they went to many lands. It is not given to us in the same literal form. And yet it is given in a very real form. For the substance of God’s command is to venture forth into the unknown, which may be frightening, and to venture forth with faith and with courage. And in that sense the command is addressed to every human being. Every day has an unknown quality. Every new idea has an unknown challenge implicit within it.

The age in which we are living is characterised by change, and not only change, but it seems change at an accelerating pace. There is new technology. There is political unrest and change. There is religious unrest, and the breakdown of past sureties. We’re being called to meet new situations, to tackle unprecedented problems, to venture forth into the unknown with faith and courage.

But after the command comes a promise...” in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” After the command, I say, and conditional on our obedience to the command. Had Abraham disobeyed, had he remained in his father’s house and refused to venture forth into the unknown, he could never have become the father of that mighty nation from which Our Lord came. Had the fallen of the wars stayed at home, Europe in the second world war would have fallen to a totalitarian Nazi regime, and the free world as we know it and enjoy it, would not exist. The fallen too were a blessing to others – and to us – only by virtue of their obedience.

As with Abraham, as with the fallen, so too with us. No good ever comes from evading God’s call or life’s difficulties. No good ever comes from sheltering from hard decisions under the cosy umbrella of endless debate. The families of the earth will bless themselves by us only insofar as we too are obedient, as we cast aside the lesser securities to which we cling, and as we venture forth into the frightening unknown with God, and with the faith and courage which he gives to each of us according to our need. This is true for all of us – as individuals, as a church, and as a nation. And so to the rightful remembrance of those who died there must be added today the rightful rededication of us who live.