Morningside Sermon 10.45am 8/11/26

Remembrance Sunday

## Being prepared

*Psalm 70; Matthew 25:1-13*

The Government recently issued advice advising how we should be ready for emergencies. Not just the looming threat of the Russian dictatorship illegally attacking Ukraine, and incursions into NATO airspace, and sea lanes where vital communication links and oil pipes are threatened - that's bad enough. There has been a spate of bomb threats to several airline industries, with the finger of suspicion pointed at the Russians again. The billion-dollar crypto currency online heist, with suspicion levelled at the North Koreans. A cyber-attack on French blood banks recently attempted to raise temperatures in refrigeration systems, but quick action by staff ensured that no blood products were damaged. There was a similar attack affecting refrigeration systems across European shops last week. Might that also mean that our energy supply may face challenges, which would affect not only heating and lighting, but access to the internet which controls so much of our banking, shopping and social lives too. There's a need to be realistic, and to be prepared.

Also given the number of extreme weather situations that have arisen, rain, floods, storms and snow, the generally good practice of being prepared seems sensible and not scaremongering. Bottled water for drinking and washing and hygiene. Non-perishable foodstuffs. Torches and wind-up radios, which can also charge mobile phones. Money and documents (I knew the paperless society would make us vulnerable!) Keeping up to date with medical prescriptions. Pet food. And for the more socially inclined, a well-stocked wine rack as you attempt to negotiate your way through nuclear or metrological winter.

It wasn't all that different in the 60s and 70s when I was growing up and we faced real threats during the Cold War, aided then by grandparents and parents who had lived through two World Wars and a time of rationing, where keeping a well-stocked larder and pantry was a matter of every-day living.

In truth we are nearly always at war with something or someone, and the need to be prepared never really goes away. Some learn it as young people: ***Be prepared*** is the motto for the Scouting and Guiding movement.

I suspect it is rooted in the Judaeo-Christian tradition which is at the root of so much of western culture. We read about it in Matthew's Gospel and the parable of the wedding feast and the wise and foolish virgins. The point Jesus is making in this story is not about sharing, He talks about that in other places. Here He is focussing attention on the need to be ready, the need to be prepared in life. Weddings in Jesus' time, as in ours, are moments of celebration but they can be prone to mishap. People can be delayed. In Jesus' time guests assembled at the home of the bride and were entertained by her parents while waiting for the groom. When the bridegroom approached, the guests, including bridesmaids, lit torches and went out to greet him. Then the whole gathering processed to the bridegroom's home where his parents waited for the ceremony and the extended banquet that followed.

In this story, the bridegroom is delayed, and the guests fall asleep. When he eventually arrives, not everyone is ready, not everyone was prepared for the delay. Jesus sums up the point of this story: Watch, stay awake, be prepared, for you know neither the day nor the hour when Jesus will return, and we will be held to account for what we have done with our lives, and for what we have not done.

On a Remembrance Sunday, when we think about the preparedness, or lack of preparedness before World Wars and other wars since, we might also turn our minds to our preparedness, or lack of preparedness, for what should follow war - the prospect for peace. For us, for our enemies, for the world and for all our communities. In a time of Remembrance we might reflect that it was never simply about winning the war. It is also about winning the peace that follows. To enter into any war with no thought to what will happen after is a crime against humanity, and an abuse of the armed forces and others whose lives are put on the line when conflict comes. It has been the charge levelled against President Trump and his war against Iran. Should the war in Ukraine come to an end, what kind of relationships will need to be recast between Ukraine and Russia and the rest of the world. If the Israeli war against the Palestinians, smouldering on in a hostile truce, reignites, what pathway to equitable peace with justice needs to be forged again? In these three contemporary conflicts, the impact has not simply been regional, it has been global, as the consequences have been felt across the world in every economy and in every walk of life. We saw its consequence in last week's mid-term elections in the United States. Thank God.

Jesus' call for people to stay awake, and to be ready, and to be prepared, is a theological and political and social rallying cry which encompasses war, and peace, and the entirety of life. Are we ready, are we awake enough, are we prepared in our private and our public life to engage with all of the challenges affecting our society today. And, for the Christian, to bring our faith values in to play. This kind of preparation has to do with participation. Readiness and preparedness is not something that is the responsibility of others. It is our collective responsibility to engage with the hopes and fears, the challenges and opportunities that come from being alive at this moment. Ready to help and serve. Ready to be honest and generous. Ready to be clear about what is right and acceptable and honourable, and about what is not. And to do something about it! Are you

prepared for that in the way you are living your life today? How we respond, how we engage, how we participate matters. It will shape our lives, and it will shape the kind of community and the kind of world in which we live.

For the believer, that means paying attention to what Jesus said: stay awake, be prepared. Things need doing and fixing and reshaping and reimagining in our world wherever we see injustice or unfairness or prejudice or exclusion. If we want to see change for the better in our world, we have to be part of that change. We have to get involved. We have to make commitments. Maybe, like the names of those women and men on war memorials up and down the land, we may have to make significant sacrifices to ensure that the kind of world we want to live in, and that we want to secure for generations to come, is not simply a pipe dream but a reality. It's not simply about winning wars, it is about preparing for peace. For everyone.

On the back of the order of service this morning you'll find a meme I came across at the time our Government issued its advice about being prepared for emergencies. It raised a smile, but it makes a point. Alongside your tins of beans and bottles of water and pet food, might there be other things we should also put in store, as we get prepared:

*The Government urges citizens to stock up on* ***essentials****, like kindness, empathy, and a sense of humour.*

Essentials, after the war, working toward peace. Essentials, after a time of fear and uncertainty, working towards hope. Essentials, after a time of pain and loss, working towards love.

Jesus calls us to be prepared, maybe with kindness, empathy and a sense of humour. Start preparing for peace, and hope, and love. And don't wait for a crisis or emergency. Do it now!

**In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit**

**Amen**