

REMEMBRANCE ISLIP 2025

I have been wondering what I should say this morning. I suppose I suffer from the delusion that people will actually remember what I said last year and the year before and I don't want to repeat myself.

I also recognise that on this day our congregation is much more diverse than usual and that many of you might find church a bit out of your comfort zone. I want you all to feel included.

I imagine you have each come today for a different reason: many will be remembering a family member who has given their life in war; you might have a friend or relation who has been disabled in action. Or you are concerned for the national good, or it's your duty as a serving member of the armed services to be here. Some are here to reflect or pray, to think about what life means, to try and dig a bit deeper beneath the surface of the ordinary and the everyday and to discover values which last.

Our Armistice ceremonies go back to wars now over hundred years ago, namely the First World War, and we still read poems from WW1 by poets such as Siegfried Sassoon, Rupert Brooke, Robert Graves (who lived in this village in the 1920s at World's End just across the river), and of course Wilfred Owen, who, in the preface to his poems famously wrote: 'Above all, this book is not concerned with Poetry. The subject of it is War, and the pity of War. The Poetry is in the pity.'

I think he meant by that, that experience had taught him war is not so much about the power and the glory as it is about tragedy and sadness. You only have to look at pictures of bombed out Ukraine or desolated Gaza to see that. His poetry brought to mind in his day what today our TV screens bring into the living room.

In *Dulce et Decorum Est*, he pictures a trudge through a muddy battlefield carrying a man, terribly injured by chlorine gas, to the field hospital:

If in some smothering dreams, you too could pace
Behind the wagon that we flung him in,
And watch the white eyes writhing in his face,
His hanging face, like a devil's sick of sin;

If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood
Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs,
Obscene as cancer, bitter as the cud
Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues, —
My friend, you would not tell with such high zest
To children ardent for some desperate glory,
The old Lie: *Dulce et decorum est*
Pro patria mori.

It is a sweet and fitting thing to die for one's country.

But don't get me wrong. Today we come together to honour those who have died in war, not reservedly or, as it were, damning with faint praise, but whole-heartedly and gratefully, and humbly, and frankly in awe of the suffering so many endured and continue to endure as disabled veterans. Only this week my wife said how much she is thinking of all who are suffering the long-term effects of physical disablement from war wounds and of those mentally scarred with PTSD, not least, she says, because her own grandfather was unable to speak about his experience in WW1 and eventually shot himself in his anguish. I guess a simple prayer is 'Lord have mercy, Lord have mercy'.

Just now we heard a reading from St Matthew's gospel:

'Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, Blessed are the merciful, Blessed are the pure in heart, and Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.'

We call these saying the Beatitudes and they are part of Jesus' moral code. They motivate us to work for a peaceful, just, and compassionate society and to beware of what breaks down society and moral order and takes away opportunity.

I think I can safely say that we all want to live in peace, to go to work, have families, tend our crops, and enjoy the life we have been given. Most of us also want to feed the hungry, see justice and fairness prevail: we have a moral compass and would do unto others as we would have them do unto us. That is what we strive for and occasionally have to fight for.