

Remembering Love

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[0 : 00] Remembrance Day. When I clocked that I'd put myself in for preaching today, I realized that that was a bad idea because it's such a difficult day.

As Clive mentioned at the start, it's so difficult. When you're someone like me, I've had stuff happen in life which has been difficult.

I've had difficulty with kids. I've had difficulty with family. I've got estranged brothers. We all have stuff that affects our life.

One of my responses is to be positive and to try and be a bit fun and take life in all its fullness.

Sometimes people think that I'm carefree. I'm not.

I care enough to push past that. When I'm speaking to you today, it's positive stuff. It's challenging stuff that I've been thinking through all week.

[1 : 04] Please don't think I'm trying to cheapen or belittle what today is about because I'm fully aware that for some of us, you're remembering people who were actually in the war.

Maybe it's World War II. Maybe it's one of the less known ones. My wife's great-granddad was in the Forgotten Army and she's got these amazing letters from Burma.

If you don't know what that is. They're just out and nobody really knows about them unless you knew people who were in it. Maybe for you today is a really potent reminder of people you know who have died or have been messed up by war.

Maybe it's loved ones or loved ones' loved ones that have been lost. Maybe you're remembering actually the hurt and the pain caused by loss, caused by war.

Maybe you are remembering with pride the bravery of those people who put their lives on the line. In the pursuit of peace. Or maybe your remembering is not so positive.

[2 : 13] Maybe you really struggle with war. Maybe even though you know how fundamentally unavoidable it was, which is the truth, maybe you still wrestle with, really, is that what we're about?

And our passage today is, I want us to kind of think of John's writings a little bit differently today. Not as just literature or theological discourse, you know, well-written stuff by clever people sat in front of a desk wanting to put a point across.

But as the memories of a man who knew Jesus. The memories of a man who wanted to pass on what he saw in Jesus and what Jesus said.

memories deep-rooted that when he thinks back cause his heart heart to beat faster, cause his hands to grip in frustration because of what Jesus had to do.

His friend had to do for the world. And when he wrote those words, the Spirit inspired them.

Through those words, we know the word of the God who loves his people.

[3 : 29] The God who would attribute the name love to himself. And I want you to think about our passage, those words, those commands.

I wonder if they could be checked on the screen. The context of this passage of chapter 14 is, just scroll through it slowly and then people can just pick up lines.

John is remembering the Passover meal. This was the final discourse, the final words of Jesus to the disciples when he sat with them and he washed their feet.

This is the time when Jesus washed their feet. When they shared bread and wine and Jesus revealed that this is how they were to remember him from evermore. That in the bread and the wine they would remember his body and his blood broken for them and for the sins of the world.

John recalls in his discourse, he recalls Judas leaving, going off to betray him and Peter's promise of unshakable loyalty.

[4 : 34] I will die with you, Jesus. And Jesus having to say to him and all the disciples, no you won't. Not yet anyway. You're going to run away. You're going to flee. The very person who wrote

this ran off naked.

What a hard time for Jesus to know the cost of what he's got to do and the people around him not even realising what that meant. And John's remembering these words.

Jesus was saying it before he was just about to go and die for all the people in that room. For all people. For all time. And John at that time had no idea what that meant.

And of course we and John when he wrote this knew the outcome. He knew that Jesus would not stay dead. That in his death death which still clings to us will take a fundamental hit and will never fully recover.

Though Jesus' death and resurrection was horrible it began the countdown of the end of death. And when death's weapons sickness, poverty, injustice and war will finally be no more.

[5 : 51] And yet we like those disciples though we know that's the outcome that we're waiting for we're still stuck in the story. Still seeing the power of death clinging on.

Still feeling the pain that it causes. And yes some of that pain we're remembering today. That death and one of its weapons war still claims a heavy toll less we forget.

Because those who forget history are doomed to repeat it. When I was preparing this passage I really wanted to ground it in a story and I asked my parents for some clarity on stories about my grandparents who fought in the war and they only remember the funny stories which was a bit of a shame.

And I was I felt no today wasn't the day for the funny stories. You can watch Dad's Army and basically they were all stories like that. But there was an amazing guy called Harry Billinge I don't know if anyone's heard the name but he's one of the few survivors of Normandy that's still alive and he was on the BBC and he was asked the presenter was basically talking to him and saying you're a hero and he said I'm the hero.

He said the hero's died. He said I'm one of the lucky ones. And in this conversation he said and the lady said to said to Harry he said what do you want to pass on to young people to the next generation?

[7 : 40] I was so so pleased with his answer he said love each other there's a lot of hate in the world and a lot of greed love is the strongest thing on earth.

Harry experienced something that most of us have never and hopefully will never have to experience and yet knowing the darkness seeing death so close holding friends dead in his arms is able to speak of love as the right response.

love. And John when he wrote down these memories and would have remembered seeing Jesus on the cross he was there he was there at the cross knowing darkness and death so close and yet too he writes of this challenge to love because as Harry knows and as John knew that's the way to a better world.

And John writes Jesus said if you love me keep my commandments keep my commands well what are those commands?

We know it it's love Matthew puts it like this love the Lord your God with all your heart with all your soul and with all your mind. And the second is like it love your neighbour as yourself.

[9 : 14] Early on in this chapter 13 Jesus tells that he loves us that God first loved us and then in chapter 13 towards the end he reminds the disciples that they are to love one another because the world will know that they're his disciples by the way they do that.

Love defines us. First thing to remember love defines the people of God. That's our role. That's our identity. Love. And in our passage in verse 15 verse 21 verse 23 verse 24 you get the point?

Jesus put some grit on that commandment. It's not just love God and love God love God and love each other is to love the other.

Yes we are loved and yes we must love each other but if you love him you will obey the commandments. If you love him, commandment one, commandment two, love your neighbor as yourself.

Sometimes the simplest truth is the hardest one to follow. If we are serious about Jesus, we need to be serious about love.

[10 : 47] We know full well what happens when we don't love our neighbor, when we don't love the other. We remember it today and people are remembering it from that day, throughout our history, again and again, when we desensitize ourselves from the other, when we see them as the enemy, when we see them as the person who is not good enough, who deserves our fight, we forget that

that is the reason it keeps happening.

Once war happens, C.S. Lewis wrote an amazing book called *Mere Christianity* and I'm sure a lot of people here have read it. It's a really powerful book because it was written just after the Second World War and it was written to a nation of soldiers, survivors and people that were asking the question, what just happened?

And there were people as soldiers who were carrying the fact that they'd killed, that they'd seen people killed and that they were not sure what it was all about. And C.S. Lewis was amazing. He wrote so well and so gently and said actually we're not here to tell you that you were wrong for going to war, we're not here essentially to make you feel bad for what happened.

There was no choice. The opportunity to prevent the war was passed. And you should be proud that you chose to fight, that you chose to be there for your nation, for people, for freedom.

I find that so potent. When I'm talking I'm not here saying yeah well it shouldn't have happened really or we should feel really bad that we went to war. The war happened and there was no way to stop it.

[12:35] Once the motions were done we missed the point. Our predecessors, our politicians, all those people that could have maybe prevented it, that's not our reality. We live with the fact that war happens and that it happened.

So we're not here talking about criticising the war and saying oh we should feel really like bad about it. No. We should feel sad and miss people and love those who hurt and survived and remember those who loved and lost.

But there is a challenge to us in that commandment to love the other, to love our neighbour. God doesn't tell us to do it because we need it.

God tells us to do it because without it we've got no chance. It's not even a necessity, it's a no chance. Without love we've got no chance.

Like Harry said, love is the most powerful thing on earth. love is our ultimate weapon. Not lovey dovey love. Not a cuddle.

[13:52] Not a Valentine's card. Not a bit of carnal desire. Agape love. Unconditional love. I love that western philosophers like Jacques Derrida call impossible.

Impossible. Impossible. And yet that is the command that we are to do it. We are to love in the impossible way.

Because unconditional love refuses to let death have the final say. Refuses to let us build up factions and divisions and reject the other. Love stands in the face of death and says you do not get the last word.

But it's impossible for us. That's what history proves. But John remembers something else that Jesus said. Verse 16.

He will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever. The spirit of truth. Impossible love is impossible love.

[15:08] And God knows that. And so the only way for impossible love to be possible is for God to do it through us. And this is the thing. If we are serious about Jesus and we are serious about choosing love, Jesus gives us the method.

Jesus gives us himself. He places his spirit within us. some translations in your Bible, some of them will say the word helper.

It's not a very helpful word. When you think of a helper, you think of someone, you know, oh I can't quite bend down and get that, can you pick that up for me? Or can you help me carry this thing in? Nice, that's not quite what that word's about. It's about an advocate. What's an advocate do? They speak for us. They speak through us.

We need the advocate, we need the spirit. Because loving our neighbour quite often feels impossible. Let's just think, we live in quite, we're in Clevedon, I'm coming from Bristol, we're in a mess right now generally in the world, but we're still in a very good place in contrast to a lot of other places in the world.

[16:24] And I wonder if you find it easy to talk to your neighbour, neighbour, literally to talk to your neighbour. That feels like impossibility, especially for my generation. Some of you guys are probably like, yeah, we're best friends with our neighbours and we have dinner parties all the time.

I've been in our house for two and a half years and I've had my first conversation with one of my neighbours and it went, can you please stop parking over my drive? Your car's going to get

scratched.

That's the reality of my generation. It's like almost, the hardest thing to do is just to talk to the other and there's no real animosity, there's no real enemy there, it's just, I'm a product of the millennial generation where we think that the world revolves around me and I'm always fighting that, you know.

And yeah, this is the call to love our neighbour, love the other. Man, if I can't even talk to my neighbour, if I can't even, yeah, just knock on the door and ask for some sugar because I'm of pride, if I can't even do that, how am I supposed to love the one that really annoys me?

We need the advocate because loving our neighbour actually sounds like madness. It makes no sense. We need the advocate.

[17:50] Today we remember that the true enemy is the prince of this world, not my neighbour, not the ever. It's the prince of this world who brings division, hate, hurt and roams the earth seeking to destroy those little moments of light.

But we know he cannot distinguish the light. Light has come into the world and the darkness has not, will not, cannot overcome it.

He will not win. But it isn't easy. We are living in the in-between. Sometimes we think that light has gone out.

Sometimes life feels like that. Wars remind us of that. It feels like the light has gone out. And yet, that video at the start was great.

In the darkness of war, people choose light. Wow. love. So we have a choice. We have a role to play.

[19:00] Jesus does not command us to love because it's nice. For the disciples loving their neighbour, loving their Abba, Abba, Uber, other, took them to the cross, took them to execution, took them to exile, took them to persecution.

And in the face of those things, they chose to love. Only because of the advocate. But it is a command for one reason alone.

And Harry knew this. Love is the most powerful thing. Love is the only way. Because when we face our enemies, when we face the darkness, if we love in the face of hate, it breaks down walls.

If we love in the face of hurt, it softens hardened hearts. And right now, I bet you can think of places where you need that.

I bet you can think of hurt. You can think of hardened hearts. You can think of hate. What in you? You want a faction? You want to pick a side? You want to be them and us?

[20:17] Well, Jesus has got a challenge for you. He's got a challenge for me. If you love me, obey my command. Love God. And love your neighbour.

So today, we remember those who have loved and lost. We remember those who have given up everything for the possibility of peace.

love. But what are you going to do with that memory? What did and does Jesus ask of us in response to evil when it manifests?

In response to the God whose weapon was a cross? Whose weapon was and is and will always be agape love?

As disciples, may we pursue this greater love? Amen.