

Remembrance Sunday

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Preacher: Rev. Jon Holder

[0 : 00] Good morning. For those of you who don't know me, my name is John and I'm married to Lydia, who was leading us in worship earlier. At the beginning of last summer, I got married to Lydia, in fact. It was only in June. Our wedding was the most wonderful day of friends and family coming together to celebrate our marriage. But it wasn't until the following morning when I was sat at breakfast with my new wife that it dawned on me that life had changed. This was new.

Life was never going to be the same again. And after five solid months of marriage, I can confirm that life has not been the same. Some of my old bachelor ways of living have, well, been updated. For example, my ultra-convenient floor drope has been replaced with a wardrobe. Apparently, you hang things up these days. My life and my rhythms have been changed. They have adapted to a new way of life. Life is new. And John uses this image of marriage in our passage in Revelation. He points, he uses it to point towards what the kingdom of God will one day look like when it comes in all its fullness. The new heaven and the new earth will be like a bride coming down out of heaven, he says. And it will be new in every possible way. In fact, newness itself will be made new. It is that revelation I experienced at breakfast that day following my wedding, but on a totally different level. Humanity will not merely transition from one phase of life to a new phase of life like I did, from putting clothes on my floor to putting them in a wardrobe. No. What God is doing is something completely new. He is renewing all things. As God himself declared in our passage, he who is seated on the throne said, I am making all things new.

[3 : 09] And within this new act of creation, there will be no room for suffering or injustice. No room for pain or violence. And even death itself will be no more.

It is the most awesome and wonderful image anyone could imagine. Full and complete wholeness and peace.

In God's kingdom, when it comes in all its fullness, we can truly say, this is new. Life will never be the same.

But here's the snag. If I'm really honest with you, I just can't imagine that world. Because I'm unable to fully disconnect my experience of this world from my imagination.

I'm unable to fully disconnect the dysfunction that we see around the world. The injustice. The violence war.

[4 : 33] So I can't imagine that perfect place where wholeness reigns. Where peace is fully known and experienced. I just can't get there in my mind.

The image in Revelation is so beyond our experience of the world today. From the reports that we read in the newspaper.

From the news we watch on our TV screens. That it becomes almost distant from our experience. We think, how could life ever be like that?

And so that glimpse that we get in Revelation of God's kingdom that is yet to come, becomes nothing more than a distant future event. An unattainable reality.

It's, well and truly, not yet. And if you're anything like me, you're tempted to disconnect from that not yet reality.

[5 : 41] Because we cannot see how it connects with us today. Perhaps, all we think is, well, we can hope against hope that maybe one miraculous day, by some great and wonderful God event, God's new peaceful kingdom will somehow become my reality too.

The thing is, the Bible tells us that that miraculous day, that great and wonderful God event has already happened.

You see, through the violence inflicted on the one who came to bring peace to the world, through his crucifixion and resurrection, Jesus has already changed everything.

Jesus' death and resurrection has secured that whole and peaceful kingdom described in Revelation. It is 100% guaranteed for all who pledge their allegiance to Christ. That will be your inheritance. and isn't that a wonderful and comforting thought for us all, particularly on a day like today when we remember those who gave their lives to secure and protect their country.

[7 : 20] But there's more. Jesus has not only secured that not yet inheritance for us, but because of his death and resurrection, God's not yet kingdom has broken into the here and now.

God's not yet kingdom is now. God's complete and total renewing work has begun in the world. Behind the scenes, God is bringing all things together. He is starting to put all things right. His kingdom is being built even in this sad and dysfunctional world in which we live in. And one day he will complete that task and it will be that picture that we read in Revelation this morning. It will be like that. That will be our reality. So in other words, we can say God's kingdom is now but not yet.

It has come but not in all of its fullness. But for God's new not yet kingdom to come to be, there's only one person we can trust with the task of making it happen because let's be honest, if you or I get involved, it's going to go bad pretty quick.

[8 : 52] And that's Jesus, right? Only he has the ability to make it what it needs to be. Humanity, we have literally zero chance of creating the world that peaceful kingdom that we've heard described in Revelation.

But here's where it gets exciting. Almost unbelievably, God invites us to join in with him in building that peaceful whole kingdom.

He invites us as we are. God has chosen his church, God has chosen his people to be his kingdom representatives, to be his kingdom ambassadors, if you like.

And as representatives, he calls us to live out his kingdom, to live his way, as the strapline of the college that I studied at says, to live like the kingdom is near.

So the question this morning for all of us is are we willing to play our part, to join in with what God is doing in his great kingdom project.

[10 : 25] A couple of weeks ago, I was in Uganda, and I had the privilege of spending 72 hours in Morobi refugee camp.

It was an incredibly difficult and challenging 72 hours, and I could tell you many stories of what life is like there.

Uganda is home to over 1 million South Sudanese refugees, and there are 2.5 million South Sudanese refugees in the world.

Alex and Harriet are two pastors who were in South Sudan, and they fled to Uganda. And this is their story.

We've got a short video. It was July 9, 2016, when the war started in South Sudan. It was Sunday. We saw the vehicle carrying soldiers.

[11 : 30] We had gun shoot all over the place. bullets were running over the roof, and I remember one of it even hit the water tank and water was flowing off.

There was no time. We had to leave the church and go to somebody's house. We had to hide ourselves under beds until the rebels. They came and told us, we are giving you only 30 minutes to leave this place.

Every people within the town left all their properties. They had to run for their life because on that very day, very many people were killed within the town and you can see dead body everywhere. When we were brought here, we were dumped in the bushes and there were very many people here in the camp living under the trees. So everybody was traumatized, including even the children. They were asking, Mama, we need to go home because they were under trees. They were seeing that they were not in their houses. But we could not forget our members in church.

[12 : 44] I called all the pastors coming together to sit down because people were traumatized. Then we decided to plant the churches very quickly so that we can encourage people with the word of God.

So we started fellowshiping under trees, encouraging them, give them a word of comfort and support and encouragement. We have seen that it is very much important to talk to our community about reconciliation, like we are coming from different backgrounds.

So we bring them together and tell them let us reconcile and let there be peace among us. So we encourage them to live peacefully in a place where we are.

Then we started gathering the youth together to take outreach to them through sports. Then we formed two clubs in the refugee camp bringing all youth together who are traumatized.

Also they have no work to do in the camp and they were involved in criminal activities. so we brought them together through sports and preaching to them. That's how we can reach them.

[14 : 03] Peace is coming and my plan is that when we go back I will reestablish all the churches which were destroyed. men. This morning I have chosen to wear a white poppy alongside my red poppy.

Alongside remembering those brave men and women who lost their lives in service of this country I wanted to remember those who are still at war.

the family and friends of Alex and Harriet who lost their lives in South Sudan. And the white poppy is a symbol of remembering all who have lost their lives in war.

Both service personnel and civilians across all wars throughout the whole of human history.

But the white poppy is also a symbol of peace. A hope for peace that peace may one day be known here on earth.

[15 : 21] And Alex and Harriet are doing exactly that. They are peacemakers in that community which has been ravaged by war.

people and what they didn't tell you in that video is that Harriet is actually a Ugandan national. She could with Alex move and stay with family in Jinja or in Kampala and have a much more comfortable life.

But they don't. they choose to live in the refugee camp. They choose to remain with their people because they long to be God's good news.

They long to be God's kingdom peacemakers in that place. You see when we are all invited to join in and when we do join in with God when we pray when we seek his kingdom to be made known here on earth it's like this we are standing with one foot in this sad and dysfunctional world but with the other foot we are stood in God's not yet perfect peaceful kingdom and we bring the latter to bear on this broken and hurting world perhaps we cannot all be Alex and Harriet's and nor is God asking us to be them but he is asking all of us to come and join in with what he is doing in the world to come and join in with bringing peace bringing hope bringing wholeness to our families to our communities and so this is the real challenge this morning where is

God asking you to be a peacemaker where is God asking you to bring wholeness where is God asking you to make his kingdom known in the world around you and may I suggest may I encourage us and this is as much to myself as it is for all of you to start small start with that annoying guy in the office start with the family member that you really need to say sorry to start with the neighbor over the road who you had a fight about their hedge being too tall and start today don't delay don't put it off don't make an excuse start today and finally stay connected it is only in God's strength that we are able to be kingdom people it is only in God's strength that we are able to see his kingdom come on earth so stay connected to him because he does not leave us to do it alone he gives us the strength to stand when we don't think we can stand any longer who had a king