

Remembrance Sunday

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Preacher: Rev. Dr. Russell Herbert

[0 : 00] A man who was staying in a hotel was in the restaurant at breakfast time and he ordered his breakfast and he said to the waiter, I'd like you to bring me something very special.

I'd like you to bring me two boiled eggs, one of them overcooked to the point where it's like rubber, the other one undercooked so it's really runny. I'd like you to bring me some bacon that's really burnt so that the moment the knife touches it, it just crumbles into ashes.

I want you to bring me some butter that's almost frozen and I'd like a pot of lukewarm weak coffee. The waiter said, that sounds rather complicated sir, that could be difficult.

He said, what's what you gave me yesterday? Imperfection is a hallmark of what it is to be human. We live in a broken world. Today on Remembrance Day as we look back but also as we look forward and as we pray for peace throughout the world we were reminded of how no matter how many times history repeats itself we are a broken race.

[1 : 28] Imperfection is a hallmark of what it is to be human. Such that even if we try our very best to do the right thing over and over and over again we get it wrong.

Imperfection is a hallmark of what it is to be human. And we need to grasp that if we're to understand the fundamental message of Jesus and why we call it good news.

Because until we fully grasp it and own it we cannot really understand the depth, the gravity, the power of the Christian gospel and why it is so transformative.

None of us is perfect. And we cannot say that in a glib, we should not say that in a glib, pass off kind of way.

We are broken people, every single one of us. We are broken people, every single one of us. We are broken people, every single one of us. And yet, in these words of Jesus, we are told that for all our brokenness, all our imperfection, all our refusals to learn the lessons from history, global history, national history, personal history, history, he not only forgives us, but says remain in me.

[3 : 13] What does that mean? Clearly, it's only possible if something unique happens. And as Jesus talks about laying down your life for others, we see that modeled in Jesus' act of going to the cross, breaking the power of death and sin and being raised that we might come to him.

But he doesn't just say in these words about coming to him or about being forgiven or about just being with him. He says remain in me.

What does that mean? The term in Christ comes up over and over and over again in the New Testament.

That if you are a follower of Jesus, you don't just follow him. You're in him. It's rather like if I take this Bible and a piece of paper.

This is Christ, that's you. When you become a Christian, you don't just believe a load of stuff about Jesus, although you do. You're actually planted in him.

[4 : 38] Where this book goes, that piece of paper goes. Where Jesus goes, you go. Jesus has gone to death and through death and out of the other side and is raised, which means that when you are in him, you're safe.

For all eternity. Where he goes, you go. You are in Christ. And so when Jesus says, remain in me, wow, what a call, what a promise, what an invitation that is.

How do we make sense of it? How do we make sense of it when God? God is God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, what we call the Trinity.

Sometimes we run scared of it. Sometimes we run scared at that idea. It sounds way too complicated. And yet what I want to suggest is that in fact opens the way, when we understand God as Father, Son and Spirit, it opens the way for us to understand so much more fully what it is to be in Christ, to remain in him.

Bear with me while we delve into a little bit of systematic theology. Often we trip up with the idea of the Trinity because we think of God, well, how can God be three and one?

[6 : 10] God is the Father, that's one. God is the Son, that's Jesus, that's another one. God the Holy Spirit and another one. God plus Father plus Son, that's one plus one plus one.

One plus one plus one is? Three. Three. So how can three be one and one be three? It doesn't make sense. Now I'm not going to suggest for one moment that what I'm about to say solves the theological complexity that has been wrestled with by theologians for thousands of years. I'm not. Neither am I trying to oversimplify something that is genuinely profound. But I wonder whether perhaps we sometimes trip up over this idea of understanding the Trinity in mathematical terms as Father plus Son plus Spirit, in terms of additions.

You see, if we were going to use abstract thought at all to understand the nature of God, it would make far more sense, rather than using the language of additions, if we're going to use a mathematical term, let's use multiplication.

Why? Because when we see Father, Son and Spirit presented in Scripture, we see them presented not as those that exist in addition to one another, but rather that coexist in such a way that magnify one another.

[7 : 37] Jesus, the Son, points to the God, magnifies, points to the Father, magnifies the Father. Says, here he is, come and know him. The Father says, by his Spirit as a Spirit comes upon Jesus at his baptism, this is my Son with whom I am well pleased.

Each magnifies the other. If we're going to talk maths at all, multiplication makes sense. It's not Father plus Son plus Spirit. It's Father times the Son times the Spirit.

And it goes on and on. Father times Son times Spirit times Father times Son times Spirit times Father times Son times Spirit. Are you with me? One times one times one is one.

In classic theology, the word that's used to describe all of this stuff is perichoresis. Of course it is, you say. Perichoresis, when you break that word down, it means literally circle, peri, dance.

And theologians use that word to describe how God the Father, God the Son, God the Spirit, who live as one and bring glory to one another, live in a dynamic relationship with one another.

[8 : 57] Imagine that image of a dance. It's been used in art, Christian art, for centuries. So when we think of the Trinity, God the Father, God the Son, God the Spirit, we think of this circle, this relationship.

But it's not a closed one. Because every time Jesus opens his mouth, he says words of invitation. Come. Come follow me. Come be with me. Come remain in me.

So to bring this back to reality, or back to everyday life. When we talk about God as Father, God the Son, and God as Holy Spirit, it's not just some obscure piece of theological dogma that's gathering dust somewhere.

Not if we understand it properly. God as Father, Son, and Spirit is a statement of who God is, as the open God, who causes us not just to believe in him, but to actually partake in him.

[10 : 12] To be part of that Trinity. To be in Christ. When you follow Jesus, you don't just believe stuff about God.

When you follow Jesus, you become in Christ. You are part of the being of God.

For all our brokenness, for all our inhumanity, for all our sin and our destruction, God nevertheless in his grace, by the gift of Christ on the cross, opens up himself and says, come to me and be in me.

To be in Christ. Remain in me. It's not just a once and for all thing.

It's a call, an invitation for all eternity. To be in God. To be in Christ. Which means that you are known in a way by him that you can be known by nobody else.

[11 : 27] He knows you inside out and back to front, not only because he created you and sustains you, but because you are called to be in him. Which means there's nothing that you can go through or face that he doesn't already know about.

Because you're in him. Where he goes, you go. Where you go, you're held, remaining in him.

But one last thought. When we hear that word remain, or abide, as some translations of scripture would put it, we can kind of think of something that is static, as though, well, you're never going to go anywhere.

But you know the opposite is true. It means that wherever you go, wherever you go, you remain rooted in him.

Life changes. Circumstances change. And we can face the future, and we can grip our hair into terror. Because we don't know what that future holds.

[12 : 41] Except that when we remain in him, and we are rooted in him, we can know precisely where we are. The ethicist John Kavanagh once sought out the advice of Mother Teresa, following the guidance for the rest of his life.

He spent three months on a pilgrimage, going to see Mother Teresa, Calcutta. And towards the end of his time there, Mother Teresa apparently said to him, what can I do for you?

And he said, I want you to pray. Would you pray that I may receive clarity for my future? Mother Teresa laughed at him.

Said, no. I will not. Clarity is the last thing you are clinging to, and you must let go of it. John Kavanagh was rather taken aback.

And he replied, but you always seem so clear about what you do. Mother Teresa replied, I have never had any clarity whatsoever.

[14 : 12] What I have is trust. So I will pray that you will trust Jesus. we are called to remain in him, to know that whatever else life may bring our way, we are rooted in him, held in him, and nothing can ever take that away.

May we trust that that is so. Let's pray together. Lord, living Lord, thank you that you call us not only to know about you, and not even just to know you, but to know that when we are forgiven, we are in you, held in you, so Lord, help us in our everyday lives to remember that by day and by night, that we are in you.

Give us that peace, give us that reassurance that can only come from that knowledge.

Thank you. In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.