

Remembrance Sunday 2013
Job 19: 23 – 27a; Luke 20: 27 - 38

We meet today to pay tribute to the men and women who have given service, often by making the ultimate sacrifice, in wars and conflicts over the last hundred years. We give thanks for them; and we remember before God man's inhumanity towards man which has required that service to be given and those sacrifices to be made. We remember before God that – for our sakes and in our name – people have been asked to see things and do things that nobody should ever have to see or do.

And this year, as we hear about the Court Marshall which has concluded this week, we are reminded that – for our sake and in our name – brave and courageous people run the risk of being utterly dehumanised under the pressures of war. Such is the nature of what they do for us. We give thanks that such shocking misconduct is indeed an

aberration from the noble and honourable traditions in which those, whose lives we commemorate today, conducted themselves. But whilst we should not underestimate the seriousness or the exceptional nature of the misconduct, we do need to acknowledge that the pressures under which it occurred are part and parcel of warfare. Thank God that it is so rare that people crack under such pressures.

What we need to remember is that human ethics in general, and the ethics of war in particular, are always ambiguous – even when wars are manifestly just. There can never have been a more plainly just war than the Second World War. There can be no doubt that when people like Ginger Lacey, whose memorial we are privileged to have in this church, fought in the Battle of Britain; and when members of any service fought in other theatres of operations, they were doing so to repel

an actual attempt to invade this country and others besides. And there can equally be no doubt that, had that invasion been successful, an inherently and abhorrently evil regime would have been imposed upon us: it would have annihilated the freedoms and diversity of political expression and ethnicity and sexuality in which we rejoice today as a civilised and liberal society. And men and women achieved that for us because they were selflessly faithful and honourable and courageous and because they had justice on their side.

But make no mistake: those young men and women – selflessly faithful, heroic, courageous and just though they were – were still expected to do things that nobody should ever have to do. And there are still those among us, even today, who know it from first hand experience; and who carry with them, on our behalf, the burden of the nightmares that memory of it causes.

Our Bible reading, which at face value is all about marriage, reminds us that God's ways are not our ways. Sometimes we have to make arrangements which address our human condition. And we come here today because we believe that some good can come out of the arrangements and sacrifices we make. Of course there can never be heaven on earth. There never has been, and there never can be, a war truly to end all wars. But the courage of those who make the ultimate sacrifice is heroic. And the invitation to us is to ensure that good can flow from it.

So let us respond to that invitation by committing ourselves to build up the common good; and, in so doing, to make a fitting tribute and memorial to the selfless service and sacrifice of those whom we gather today to remember.

Amen.