Remembering the Dead, Choosing the Way of Peace

Remembrance Sunday | 8 November 2026 | English Church Heidelberg

Wisdom 3:1–9 • Psalm 23 • Romans 8:31–39 • John 15:9–17

The most faithful way to remember those who died in war is to work for a world in which others may live in peace.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Today, on Remembrance Sunday, we gather with different histories, different memories, and perhaps even different understandings of war and peace. Some of us come from countries that remember victory. Others come from countries that remember defeat, occupation, or liberation. Still others come from places where war is not simply something remembered from history, but a reality that continues to shape people's lives today.

Yet we gather here, not to celebrate the triumph of one nation over another, but to remember the preciousness of human life, to mourn those who have died, and to renew our commitment to the peace to which Christ calls us.

Remembrance Sunday has a particular historical significance, especially for our British brothers and sisters. We honour those who served and died in the two world wars and subsequent conflicts. But as an international congregation, our remembrance must also make room for other experiences of suffering and loss.

We remember soldiers and civilians, those killed in battle and those who perished in their homes, those whose names are engraved on monuments and those whose deaths were never recorded.

The Book of Wisdom reminds us that “the souls of the righteous are in the hand of God.” This is a profound assurance. Human history may forget countless lives, but God does not. Every person matters, regardless of nationality, race, religion, or social standing.

Psalm 23 offers another assurance: “Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me.” Faith does not promise

that we will never experience suffering. It assures us that even in suffering, God does not abandon us.

For those who have lost loved ones, for refugees who have fled violence, and for families still living with the consequences of war, these words speak of God's enduring presence.

Paul takes this assurance even further in his Letter to the Romans. He declares that neither death nor life, nor anything else in all creation, can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

Think about what this means. War separates families. Violence destroys communities. Hatred divides nations. Death takes away those we love. Yet none of these has the power to destroy God's love.

And if God's love is stronger than hatred, should we not allow that love to shape how we treat one another?

This brings us to the heart of today's Gospel.

Jesus tells his disciples: “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.” He continues: “No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends.”

These words are frequently heard on Remembrance Sunday. They rightly remind us of those who gave their lives in the service of others. Their courage, sacrifice, and suffering deserve our respect.

But we must be careful not to confuse honouring sacrifice with glorifying war.

Jesus was not teaching his disciples to celebrate violence or death. He was teaching them the meaning of self-giving love. His own life was devoted to healing the wounded, welcoming the excluded, confronting injustice, and reconciling people with God and one another.

His sacrifice on the cross was not an endorsement of violence, but the ultimate expression of a love that refused to surrender to hatred.

Therefore, remembering those who died must also challenge us to prevent the suffering that war brings.

We cannot genuinely honour the victims of war while remaining indifferent to the suffering of people caught in wars today. We cannot pray for peace while allowing hatred, prejudice, and the dehumanisation of others to flourish.

And we cannot speak of reconciliation without recognising that genuine peace requires truth, justice, and accountability.

There is something particularly meaningful about preaching this message here in Germany.

This country carries a painful history of war, militarism, Nazism, and the Holocaust. Remembering that history is not simply about acknowledging what happened. It is also about accepting the responsibility to ensure that such atrocities are never repeated.

And here in Heidelberg, people from different nations, including nations that once fought against one another, now gather around the same table of Christ.

What a powerful testimony this can be!

But our diversity alone does not make us a community of reconciliation. Simply worshipping in the same building does not mean that we have learned to understand, respect, and care for one another.

We must intentionally build relationships across our differences. We must listen to experiences unlike our own, welcome those who feel like strangers, stand beside those who are grieving, and refuse the prejudices that divide people.

Our calling is not merely to remember peace as an ideal, but to practise it in our relationships.

Jesus reminds us that we did not choose him, but that he chose us and appointed us to bear fruit—fruit that will last.

Perhaps the lasting fruit of our remembrance should be communities where compassion overcomes indifference, understanding replaces suspicion, and reconciliation becomes possible.

Dear brothers and sisters, we cannot change the wars of the past. We cannot bring back those whose lives were lost. But we can decide what kind of world we will help to build for those who come after us.

We can choose whether to pass on the bitterness of history or the possibility of reconciliation. We can choose whether our differences will divide us or become opportunities to practise the love of Christ.

And perhaps this is one of the most meaningful ways we can honour those who have died: not merely by remembering how they lost their lives, but by committing ourselves to a world in which others may live.

May our remembrance become a commitment to peace, our gratitude become an act of love, and our faith become a living witness to reconciliation.

For the most faithful way to remember those who died in war is to work for a world in which others may live in peace.

Amen.