

This year marks the 100th anniversary of the start of the First World War, whose ending in 1918 gave rise to the tradition of Remembrance Sunday, which most Commonwealth countries, and some allies of that war, are observing today in honour of those who were willing to lay down their lives for our countries. A London newspaper report from 1919 noted that as the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month on that first anniversary approached, people, vehicles, and other machinery in Britain just began to stop and go quiet. Individuals cried, silently also. Obviously the personal grief of so many of them who had lost loved ones and comrades in arms was still raw. So would have been the pain of family members caring for those who had been maimed. And the horror of war was still very real, as was the contemplation of how much worse it could have been, especially if the outcome had gone the other way. So, in addition to mourning and remembering with a sense of honour those who had sacrificed life and limb in this way, the people were also deeply thankful to them. And to God . for the eventual outcome; and for other instances where, despite all the carnage suffered, they could clearly see God's protection in evidence. For there have been accounts published of *documented* reports from the battlefields, witnessed by a number of people, for which there was no other explanation but Divine Intervention. Even a cursory look at some of them, documented by individual questioning of enemy officers and other independent steps for verification, can indeed make the spine tingle, and explain why people had to see such incidences as God intervening directly to fashion the immediate outcome. God's personal protection is clearly experienced supernaturally in many situations still by those who trust in Him, just as in those incidents in the First World War or battles in Old Testament accounts. But, as it was in the Bible also, we do not know how and why God chooses to intervene in such ways sometimes but not in others. Or rather, not always by providing *earthly* protection in some extraordinary way, though clearly He protects us and provides for us daily, minute by minute, in what we have come to consider ordinary ways, and sometimes God chooses only to save the faithful by His ultimate, *heavenly* enfoldng. Why some times there is the miraculous intervention and not others, is not a subject I am qualified to take on, as I am reminded when I look at the memorial plaques in Elmslie, so far removed from the centres of power that can bring the world to war, and especially when I contemplate the lady who lost both her husband and son in battle.

Nevertheless, that spontaneous time of stillness, tears and thanksgiving reported in England in 1919 was no doubt experienced also in many other countries that day, including Cayman I suspect, as our tiny population of the time was not exempt. And the act of remembrance has continued since, compounded and refreshed by World War 2 and other, narrower, wars. For, despite what people told themselves in 1919, perhaps searching for meaning in the incredible and unparalleled scale of slaughter they had experienced, it was *not* the war to end all wars. Countless, literally, people killed, estimated as best could be done at 10million, and another 20 million maimed and wounded. Multiply that by 4 to get the equivalent affect in today's world. And obviously the suffering did not end that November day, not just for the maimed, traumatised and heartbroken, but also for all survivors in the physically and economically devastated countries where this unprecedented type of warfare had taken place.

And *why*, we could well ask. According to a BBC reflection to mark another Remembrance Day a number of years ago, "None of the states that went to war realised how long it would last or *how terrible the cost might be*. Most thought it would be over in a few short months and that peace would return in 1915. Once the war had begun, the initial reasons for being involved *seemed to become less important*."

The great powers battled it out to see who would be left standing at the end. That assessment is chilling to contemplate as the basis for such death and devastation, even while remembering the incredible sacrifices, the bravery, heroism and, probably most of all, the discipline of frightened and ordinary soldiers, behind all of this, and which ultimately was marshalled so that evil did not triumph. In the end we know it could not have, because evil is unacceptable to God; what we do not know is when that end might have come if those men and women had not sacrificed so for that outcome, and what kind of world we might have had to live through had evil not been checked in 1918. But obviously evil has not given up and continues to rear its ungodly head. And clearly millions of ordinary people lost their lives serving valiantly also amongst the defeated nations of that First World War. Many of the former enemies of that time are now allied together in the face of today's forces of evil; and in the decades in between the allies and the enemies have had various changes of allegiance as greed for power or some other form of disobedience of God's precepts has eventually sparked successive conflicts.

So, what do we need to *really* bear in mind as we remember and give thanks today to both God and those who fought and died for the side of freedom and justice, as it is generally summed up, in past wars?

The BBC a few days ago carried a heart-warming story of a man who, as it happens, was alive at both the start and end of the First World War, though the story is centred on his particular acts of heroism at the dawning of the *Second* World War. I think many of us would agree with his worrying conclusion about the state of our collective remembrance, notwithstanding all those horrors that took place in just his lifetime. And it very much reminds us of the earlier report suggesting the powers of the day sort of bumbled into the First World War without realising fully the carnage ahead. The highlights of the article explain as follows:

A British man who saved 669 children, most of them Jews, from the Nazis has been awarded the Czech Republic's highest state honour.

Sir Nicholas Winton was 29 when he arranged trains to take the children out of occupied Czechoslovakia and for foster families to meet them in London.

The 105-year-old was given the Order of the White Lion by the Czech president.

In a speech, he thanked the British people who gave the children homes

BBC Prague correspondent Rob Cameron said Sir Nicholas lived a life of "relative obscurity" in England but in the Czech Republic he was "treated with enormous gratitude and respect".

Sir Nicholas, who lives in Maidenhead, was born in May 1909.

He did not tell anyone about his actions for 50 years, until his wife found a scrapbook.

He organised a total of eight trains from Prague to London and helped to find foster families for the refugees.

He said he was aware that many children would have died if it had not been for his actions, but added: "That's what was happening all over Europe."

A ninth train - the largest, carrying 250 children - was prevented from leaving by the outbreak of World War Two. None of those children is believed to have survived.

When asked by the BBC what he made of today's world, Sir Nicholas responded: "*I don't think we've ever learnt from the mistakes of the past...* The world today is now in a more dangerous situation than it has ever been and so long as you've got weapons of mass destruction which can finish off any conflict, nothing is safe anymore."

So, while it is right that we should have this time of remembrance today, we need to do so within the context of God's strictures for life and what this means in the countless ways loving our neighbour must be manifested. For God's word is always clear that anything else will never succeed in the end; and that evil, sooner or later, devours those who pursue it. Psalm 9: 15-18 forewarns us: [read].

And from the vision of God's ideal painted by Isaiah and in Micah 4: 1 . 5 we see that war was not meant to be: [read]

I will never have the power to start a war and hopefully none of us will have to wage it. But those words of God through the Psalmists and the prophets dictate also how *you and I* each need to live. For we each have the capability to inflict pain on others, to devastate lives, particularly of those who love us, and to nurture the growth of evil or, simply by inaction, at least give it room in which to grow unfettered. But in so doing undoubtedly we too will be digging a pit which will trap *us*. *Alternatively*, we can *obey God* and choose to be like the 29 year old Nicholas Winton, an ordinary person like you and me, a bank worker, not a superhero. There are still countless children who need to be snatched from the many evils that today are as real and active as the Nazis of 1938. And even if we cannot go into faraway places to personally rescue them, we can easily contribute through organisations like Christian Aid to save those who are being abducted and slaughtered, terrified and hungry or starving from ravages of barbarism. Or you can help through our own Church's mission in Haiti to combat the evils of hunger, disease and neglect; or the children in our orphanages in Jamaica who need to experience the caring love of Christ expressed in such basic ways as food, shelter, clothes, medicine, schooling and loving supervision. Right here at home, though we are so blessed to be protected from the terrors that many other children live with, there is much we must still do to ensure *all* of our children enjoy fullness of life free from evil, in keeping with God's design that their needs be not ignored nor their hope crushed. For today, and every day, we must *remember* the Lord our God, Who has shown us what is *good* . and that *that* is what He requires of each of us.

Amen