Sermon on Remembrance Sunday, 8 November, 2026 at St Mary's Hertingfordbury

by Rev. Alan Stewart

Readings: 1 Corinthians 12. 21-26 & John 19. 28-30

Re-membering

These bodies of ours are extraordinary, aren't they? Fragile yes, but also incredibly resilient. Daily, our immune systems fight viruses and bacteria. With time, broken bones fuse and wounds clot and repair, leaving scar tissue as reminders.

I have a collection of scars; mostly self-inflicted, and each one a story. A newborn fingernail scratch to my cheek; a cut-throat razor slice to my middle finger; a dislocated hip from my first, and last, time on a motorbike!

Every one of us carries scars, some visible; others not.

Today we remember those physically and psychologically scarred by wars, past and present, and those who made and continue to make the ultimate sacrifice for the freedom of others. It's a time to remember because we are so much better at forgetting, and always so slow to learn from our past. So, today we remember in order to commit ourselves to re-member; to put back together all that war dismembers or tears apart. We commit ourselves to heal wounds visible and invisible between peoples and between nations.

The rationale for war is complex and varied, often involving territory, ideology, retaliation and sadly, ego. Egos are fueled by pride, greed, humiliation and, perhaps most of all, fear; fear of losing face or sovereignty; fear of difference; fear of the 'other'.

We humans are suspicious of those who aren't like us. We have a tendency to scapegoat. And sometimes, that's about dodging our own accountability for something, or projecting or deflecting our own failure or insecurity.

In Jesus' culture, all kinds of people were scapegoated; blamed for the problems in society, blamed for God's anger. Interestingly, these are the people Jesus chose to hang around with. And finally, he takes that blame to the cross. 'It's finished,' he cries, as if he's saying, 'I will be your final scapegoat; throw all your insecurity, all your anger, all your blame at me. And here, on this cross, I'll take it. But it ends here. No more temple sacrifice, no more scapegoating, no more blame. It is *finished*.'

It's been said that the world's problems began when the zebras with the white stripes started disliking the zebras with the black stripes.

Too easily, we forget that we are all just 'zebras'. We are one human race, part of the one great family. In the language of Paul in today's letter, we are part of the same body. And yet, we're so quick to forget this; so quick to denounce and demonise and dismember others, forgetting they are part of ourselves.

So, how do we re-member; how do we work at mending and making peace within this one human Body?

On a global scale, it's easy to feel powerless. But actually, we do have power, because peace always starts here, within each one of us, in the choices we make. We have the power, obviously, to vote against those who would scapegoat others. We have the power to shut down conversations that scapegoat the poor or the unemployed or the Muslim or the immigrant or…? We have the power to work on ourselves, to take a long hard look at our prejudice, which we all have; to name what we feel. We have the power to keep in check our tendency to judge. And, ultimately, we can ask God for the desire to forgive, because when we don't, we hold two people captive; them and us.

We can ask to see others as fellow 'zebras' with all the same hopes and dreams and insecurities. We can listen to their stories, because when you know someone's story, the stones we naturally throw begin to fall from our hands.

I've been catching up on the hard-hitting BBC crime drama '*Time*', written by the brilliant Jimmy McGovern. In series two, which is set in a women's prison, there's a character who's there because she did the unimaginable; she killed her own baby. And the other inmates make her life hell. And then, finally, in a circle in the prison chapel, she begins to tell her story; one of severe postnatal depression and psychosis, where she also tried to end her own life. And, although that doesn't condone what she did, slowly, you

can see, one by one, those invisible ‘stones’ the others were carrying begin to silently drop. It’s harder to hate, harder to scapegoat, when we know someone’s story.

We all carry scars; some visible, others not. Our scars are our stories and there is, I believe, One who knows our stories better even than we know them ourselves. And it is to this One who understands, this God, that we can bring all our hurt and all our fear. This is the beginning of peace for ourselves; the beginning of peace for our world.

