

Read the Archbishop's address at the Service to mark the Centenary of the Armistice at Westminster Abbey today.

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

The battlefields of the world on 11th November 1918 were images of destruction and despair. Millions of soldiers had fallen, the vast majority young men.

Many more millions bore the scars of war, psychological and physical. Empires had been destroyed, the old order of things had ceased to be.

At home yet more millions mourned the absent and lost, or sought to care for the wrecked yet still loved family or friends who had gone away whole and returned so harmed.

The global economy was shattered, a shattering made worse by the hatreds that imposed reparations on the vanquished, and sowed the seeds for the next, still crueller and greater conflict.

Like the malevolent aftershocks of a great earthquake, civil wars sprang into flame amongst the ruins and harried refugees were hunted hither and thither.

The great cry was of a war to end all wars, of building a nation fit for heroes.

Some good things had emerged, built in idealism and dreams of conflict transformed, such as The League of Nations. Yet no sooner were they, than they were slowly killed – destroyed by dictatorships, isolationism, a turning inwards by the strong and the manipulations of the ruthless, by Depression and by tyranny and ancient hatreds which had not been reconciled.

Twenty-seven years later there was a world whose destruction was orders of magnitude greater.

The people to whom Isaiah wrote would have nodded in agonised recognition. Exiled amidst mass slaughter, captive in a cruel and far away land, they returned to a ruined, occupied, leaderless and impoverished country.

To them Isaiah, the Jewish prophet spoke, of God's faithfulness and of human responsibility. They were to trust the God who would not forget a single human being and to act in love for the poor, for the weak and oppressed.

And to us, in a few minutes, in a sublime gesture, another Jewish man's words will be heard, a disciple of Jesus, John, writing amidst persecution and suffering yet with the same underlying theme: the faithfulness of God and the responsibility of human beings.

He calls for us to love one another, not to hate or to pursue revenge.

He writes out of knowing God in Jesus, who died on the cross and rose triumphant from the tomb, demonstrating that in his faithful obedience the final verdict on evil is defeat; the final call to human beings from the God we worship here today is hope, life and liberation.

The fact that John's words will be read in German, by that country's President – a friend to this nation – demonstrates what can be done.

On this day we remember in order to act. We look back at the ruins and find that they have been rebuilt. We look forward, in a very different world and society, however great the challenges, and see that through the faithfulness of God and our loving obedience, conflict has been transformed and enemies have reconciled. And that is hope for the world.

Amen.

3 min read

Source URL: <https://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/speaking-and-writing/sermons/archbishop-canterburys-sermon-armistice-centenary-service>