

## Reflection

I was speaking at Cornbank St James Primary School in Penicuik on Friday about Remembrance. To children aged 5 to 12, it led me to wonder about the Act of Remembrance for those who do not have knowledge of anyone who died in a war?

For some of us older folk, we had parents who served in the second world war or experienced war as a civilian; who possibly had grandparents who served in the first world war. I certainly did. My grandfather served in the First World War in the Royal Navy, based in Scapa Flow. My dad was in the RAF, as ground crew in Bomber Command.

Therefore, some of us will have a direct or one-generation-removed connection with a person who served or in some way experienced the Second World War. Far fewer of us will have a direct connection to the First World War. For some, our families may have lived through the German occupation in Europe. I have Dutch friends who were young children then; they clearly remember the appalling hunger and cold of the winter of 1944/45.

For younger folk there won't be such a linkage, it will be a further step removed. The linkage may be through family stories, or through genealogical research of our families, or of school trips to the Commonwealth War Grave Commission Cemeteries across Northern France and Belgium, and visiting the Menin Gate.

So, we may not be able to remember a living person who directly experienced one of the world wars. But we cannot forget that young men either volunteered or were conscripted. That so many, far too many, gave their lives, willingly or not, in a war to uphold freedom and defeat tyranny and the abuse of power. And since those two world wars, unfortunately, there have been other conflicts where service personnel and civilians have lost their lives, including Korea, Northern Ireland, Bosnia, Afghanistan, and Iraq, to name a few.

One of the reasons for the Act of Remembrance is so that the next generation can understand the cost, suffering and horrors of war, even if a war is 'just'.

I believe we must hold on to the act of remembrance, to recall the tragedy of lives lost, of young men who had yet to reach their full potential. And part of our remembrance, part of our honouring those who died must be so that we hold our politicians to seek every possible way of peace, of brokering ceasefires, and of resolving disputes between countries with talking, not fighting and killing. Ways that wherever possible, do not involve hostile, violent acts – but instead involve jaw jaw rather than war war.

War is hardly ever the answer. It will always lead to the loss of innocent lives on all sides; and not just loss of innocent lives resulting in death, but through the scaring, damaging, injuring – both physical and mental - of so many who become damaged survivors.

So, for me, the act of remembrance is about a number of things: It is about the many millions who lost their lives, and those who returned from conflicts, with physical and/or mental scars. We honour and remember them.

It is about being willing to hold our politicians to account and not commit forces to war and urge them to make every effort to seek a just peace wherever conflict may arise. We remember all those who have died, and their grieving families who said, 'never again'.

It is about seeking peace in the current wars and conflicts in the world at this time, especially in Israel and Gaza, acknowledging the acts of war that are likely to perpetuate the animosity between Israelis and Palestinians. Given the thousands of innocent Palestinians who have died, sadly some Palestinians may be driven into the arms of the terrorists and wish to take revenge, just as the killing of 1,400 innocent Israelis may lead to revenge killings by Israelis.

Finally, remembrance is about a time to give grateful thanks that the service, suffering and sacrifice of members of the armed forces allows me to live my life of freedom now.

The numbers who died in the World Wars and especially in WW1 are so huge it is almost impossible to connect with the numbers. That is why as we commemorate those who lost their lives, we mention those who worshipped in our churches, those who lived in our communities; we can put a name to just a few of the millions, we can imagine their parents, we know the streets they lived and worked in – we can relate at an individual level.

In our gospel reading from John, Jesus confirmed that all who knew him and came to him would never be driven away. Jesus reassured his listeners that all who see the Son and believe in him may have eternal life; and that he will raise them up on the last day.

Jesus reached out to all who came to him, whether they came in love and peace, or whether they came in hostility. Jesus spoke and interacted with people that others shunned as being unworthy or being foreign and not to be trusted. Jesus broke through such barriers and engaged those who were labelled as different. He crossed the gap by relating, by talking, by listening. His is the way we are called to follow. It is costly, and can lead to bruising encounters, it can lead to death, however, it can lead to peace and transformed lives. It is the way Jesus calls us to follow.