**Remembrance Sunday 2020**

In 1914, a twenty-five-year-old South African named Percy Fitzpatrick, a former student at Oxford, was studying to be a lawyer in London. At the outbreak of war in July that year he returned home to Johannesburg and volunteered for military service. In September 1915, Fitzpatrick returned to England with the South African Heavy Artillery.

On 14th December 1917, FitzPatrick, now an acting Major, was nearing the railway station at Beaumetz in north east France to say farewell to two friends who were going on leave to England. A chance shell, fired at long range, struck. FitzPatrick was killed, aged 28. His father, Sir Percy FitzPatrick senior, a farmer and former Major of Johannesburg, had lost his eldest son.

He planted memorial trees on his land, but he wanted to do more. He had been impressed by a one-minute silence kept in his local church in 1916 after the South African casualty list had been read out. The date and time of the Armistice – the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month – inspired Sir Percy FitzPatrick to suggest an annual commemoration. The suggestion was forwarded to the King, George V. The idea was promptly taken up and the King issued a ‘call to the nation’ at the beginning of November 1919 asking that, ‘for the brief space of two minutes, there be a complete suspension of all normal activities…to perpetuate the memory of the Great Deliverance, and of those who laid down their lives to achieve it.’

The first minute’s silence is intended as a thanksgiving for those who have survived. The second minute is to remember the fallen. And so, on 11th November 1919, the Armistice Day silence was officially observed for the first time, as it is today 101 years later on.

So, why do we come together for this act of remembrance and thanksgiving usually in our church or this year as our church on zoom? Here is just a thought as to ‘a why,’ that it is about stories, 2 stories, the stories that surround war and the story of our Christian faith. Remembrance Sunday gathers together many stories of human bravery and sacrifice, some of which we have remembered today as we have heard ‘the names’ read along with the remembrances brought to us by Diana, as we reflect on the second war and the Battle of Britain. Remembrance Sunday brings all these stories into our churches and sets them alongside our Christian story, a story that also speaks of death and violence, death and violence in the crucifixion of Christ, but one that also goes on to speak of hope, hope that comes through resurrection of Christ and the promise of new life that he brings.

Our Christian story recognises the reality of human violence and our grief that, in our troubled world, it is sometimes necessary to fight and die for freedom and justice and the defence of the vulnerable, but it also teaches us that violence and sacrifice does not have the last word, that is because our hope is eternal and real, and it is rooted in the love that Christ has for us, the ‘greater love’ that made him lay down his life for all.

As we remember today and look back may we also remember and look forward, as we go home today and put our poppies aside for another year may we remember that they are a symbol, a symbol of the hope that God calls each one of us to take into the future, something that is particularly poignant in this of all years as we remember with pride and go forward with hope, not in our own strength but in the strength of the one who showed us the true meaning of greater love, the one who willingly and lovingly laid down his life not only for us but for all those we remember today.