



Sow good seeds

This followed a dramatic presentation on the Remembrance theme

I am nervous about adding more words to today's theme [Remembrance Sunday] and to the dramatic presentation we have just been given. *Remembering* and silence are closely related. Words can obscure things, badly. They can even open up disagreement about *what* is being remembered, and *how*.

The aim of Remembrance Sunday as marked in the United Kingdom and the Commonwealth is described as being "*to commemorate the contribution of British and Commonwealth military and civilian servicemen and women in the two World Wars and later conflicts*".

Why – some ask – is the event confined in this way? Why only to British and Commonwealth military and civilian service people? The answer must be because of the extraordinary and so often costly contribution they made on our behalf and because *of what we owe them*.

Yet thoughtful, searching hearts are not confined to nation states or ideological boundaries; they are likely to embrace in their remembrance all our other human sisters and brothers; all those whose lives were harmed or ended by our easy recourse to violence and to war. Then and now.

Some people are naturally able to include in the reach of their remembering even those whose actions foster conflict and war: the war mongers themselves and those who initiate violence. This is difficult; rare, I think. But it makes perfect sense if we regard ourselves as belonging to *one* human family, and if we see that the seeds of these horrors first take root in individual hearts.

In the service sheet you see a reproduction of John Singer Sargent's painting *Gassed*. It dates from 1919 and shows the effects of the use of mustard gas. The Medical Orderly (at the far right of the image) leads the line of men along duckboards. Each man, eyes bandaged, has a hand on the one in front in order to know where to go, to avoid becoming lost, to not sink in the war-mud of the trenches.

This tactile clue is a precious one when faced with the paralysing enormity of human violence and conflict. We are connected to one another in the most fundamental way. Yet we disguise that; fool ourselves into thinking we are different: different by nationality, by ideology, by religion, by whatever convenient fantasy we have to hand which in one way or another allows us to forget our belongingness and see certain other people as fundamentally different. This is an illusion; it permits all manner of inhumanity. Not only on battle fields but in backyards, in homes, in institutions.

We may fear the break-up of political unions we think favour peace; we may fear the election of those we regard as unfit, vulgar even, and themselves unenlightened. Sure, these are things to be concerned about. Yet there are no serious or credible solutions to human violence which do not seek the transformation of human hearts; and the hearts we have to begin with are – inescapably - our own.

We have a terrible record of co-existing on this remarkable planet since our recent arrival. Its soil is soaked in the blood of millions of people. More blood is being

sacrificed today. It is a sorrowful, sorrowful business.

But we must not be discouraged. We remember and honour every life harmed or ended by our war-making and violence. We thank God for every person who attends to the violence in themselves in order to

contribute to its transformation in the world. We pray for the sense, the grace, the intelligence to know that seemingly insignificant actions can sow seeds of love and trust or hate and violence, and to commit ourselves - daily, relentlessly, joyfully - to the former.