

“There is a time for silence and a time for speech” says the Teacher. On Remembrance Sunday and on then again at the Eleventh hour of the Eleventh Day of the Eleventh month, silence will be dominant; indeed one might almost say that silence will speak, for it is more than just the absence of words. Indeed, the stillness can hold us captive and stir the imagination. Silence to coin a phrase is not: ‘nothing at all’. However, what are we doing in those two minutes, in fact what perhaps are we remembering? We remember conflicts of long ago of course, faces of men, women and children whose faces are now seen in black and white photographs can come alive for those fleeting seconds as we remember that in conflict there is a time to die as well as live. This has been re-enforced of late by the hushed tributes of towns like Royal Wootton Bassett as they have received home the bodies of members of the armed forces.

In Bartley Green, where until January I was vicar, children from a number of Primary schools will come together to mark an act of Remembrance. The Year 6 children from the schools will walk in silence from the Roman Catholic to the Anglican church, carrying wreaths and crosses. In previous years, adults have stopped and bowed their heads at this eloquent, evocative witness. Children as young as 3 and 4, hold stillness, remembering ‘the soldiers’. Silence can be a simple matter of ensuring the fallen are not forgotten and of reminding ourselves that men, women and children did, and still do, actually die in ‘fields’ of conflict. For those like me who grew up

watching the 'A' Team on a Saturday evening, seeing people leap from flaming aircraft without seemingly a blemish, and those like my son who 're-spawn' their heroes on computer games when they are killed this can be an important realisation.

For armed conflict however creates ending for some and initiates jagged lives for others. Two events bring this home to me in a particular way, first the sinking of the HMS Sheffield during the Falklands Conflict and second sharing worship with a D-Day veteran.

I am a Sheffield boy, and I remember acutely where I was on 4 May 1982 when the Sheffield was hit and sunk in the South Atlantic. I recall running up the garden to tell my Dad, and sitting down with the rest of the family as the event was retold on the television news. It was mentioned in School and the then Bishop issued special prayers to be said. Death in armed conflict became real for me that day, and has shaped my remembering during the two minutes silence since then. This is particularly significant for those of us whom stand a considerable distance from the events of the Second World War and have no connection with the armed forces.

For 3-4 years, I had the privilege of sharing worship with a retired priest who was also a veteran of the D-Day campaign. My mind's eye can picture him, wearied by age, but ram-rod backed as he stood for the silence, and a crisp clear voice as he intoned the British Legion ode. His eyes moist as he finished

with the well-honed words: 'we will remember them'. What did he remember, I asked him on more than one occasion. 'I am remembering the boys who never got off the beach', he used to say. That priest has died, so in part I remember his boys.

In those two minutes, I will do two things: I will respond to my colleague's invitation to remember by doing so: remembering servicemen and women who have been killed, as well as the countless number of civilians. I will also be praying for and committing myself to work for peace, concerned that Steve Turner's powerful words that 'History repeats itself. It has to. No one listens' might become too much a pattern for our lives. I remember to remind myself that it does not have to be this way.

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