



SAINT THOMAS CHURCH FIFTH AVENUE
in the City of New York
The Reverend Canon Carl F. Turner, Rector
www.SaintThomasChurch.org

Sunday, November 14, 2021
Remembrance Sunday

Solemn Requiem Eucharist
11am

+

A Sermon by
The Most Rev. Michael Lewis, Archbishop of Cyprus and the Gulf
on
Lamentations 3:17-26, 1 John 3:1-2, John 6:37-40
+

Remembrance Sunday, 2021

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

“1,000 ages in thy sight are, like an evening gone, short as the watch that ends the night before the rising sun. Time, like an ever-rolling stream, bears all her sons away. They fly, forgotten as a dream dies at the opening day.”

I think of those lines, politically uncorrected as they are, from a hymn by Isaac Watts, that was our school hymn, because he was an old boy. I think of them whenever I find myself in the North Gate cemetery, in Baghdad, in my diocese, opposite the Iraqi Cigarette Factory.

You get to it through piles of uncollected rubbish and usually you have to climb over the gate. And then when you're inside, the North Gate Cemetery opens out as a vast walled expanse. It's hardly ever visited, and it contains some of the bodies of the dead of the Mesopotamian campaign, the one that culminated in the capture of Baghdad in March 1917 from the Ottoman Empire. A bitter success after disastrous battles and sieges on the way, not least at Kut.

The relevant British government department says that there are 4,160 named first World War Empire dead from that campaign and 2,729 unidentified bodies. Not to mention some Turks, and not to mention dead from the second World War. And at the center of this cemetery is the mausoleum of General Sir Frederick Maude, Commander, Allied Forces, Mesopotamian Campaign. He survived the battles and the sieges. He grieved deeply over the huge loss of life. And then he died there of cholera. He was the grandson of an Anglican cathedral dean. On his huge mausoleum, it says, “I am the resurrection and the life.” And when I've been there, I thought that it might also, if inscriptions could ever dare to express feelings, have quoted the lament from Lamentations that was in the first reading in this mass.

“My soul is bereft of peace. I say, “Gone is my glory and all that I had hoped for from the Lord”. We are mortal. All flesh is grass. We die. You will, and I will. Sometimes, short of war, short of gross ill fortune, we're able to pretend to live as though we don't, or not for a while. But these times of pandemic have chilled many of us with death's real nearness.

I know that All Souls here will have been kept not only very properly, but also, for many, fervently, movingly and deeply. Now here in this same month, Remembrance Day. And yet we're not defeated. That's not a cheap cliché. Somehow, we're not defeated.

That same chapter of the Lamentations of Jeremiah (and it is human, honest, even cathartic to lament) is able to say this: “because of the Lord's great love, we are not consumed”. We're not consumed. We're not reduced to nothing, even in the face of our mortality.

That was written by a Jew. Christians, too, and Christians most particularly, are not to be defeated: there are Old Testament words that signal our survival because of the attributes and the nature of God, like compassion, mercy, faithfulness, love and grace. Those Old Testament words have been spelled out and lived out in the New Testament in the Word, Christ.

“Because of the Lord's great love” unfleshed in the one like us, the one who was one of us, we will not be consumed by either suffering or sickness or war or the fact of death. In the gospel just proclaimed for this Remembrance Day, Jesus said, “this is the will of the One who sent me that I should lose nothing, no one, of all that he has given me, and I will raise them up”.

I've been a member for quite a while of the International Anglican Orthodox Theological Dialog Commission. Before COVID, but so appropriately when COVID came, we realized that rather than go on examining and debating any more of the absolutely fascinating but essentially secondary things that we differ on as Anglicans and Orthodox, what the Churches need to do is home in on agreeing and proclaiming, both to the Churches and to the world, what we agree a human being is, in the light of our faith in Christ

The fancy name for this is theological anthropology. It's fancy, for something primal. The Statement, that we eventually published as a book, is called *In the Image and Likeness: A Hope Filled Anthropology*.

Genesis teaches us that we are created in the image and likeness of God. In the Psalms, it says we are a little lower than the angels. This identity of ours is not to make us proud and presumptuous, but it is to make us praise, to make us bless, even in our clouded understanding.

And that's what the second reading this morning. 1 John 3:1-2 says. I paraphrase slightly.

“We are God's children now. What we fully shall be has not yet been revealed, but what we can know is that when He, Christ, is fully revealed, we human beings shall be fully revealed.”

We're like babies that grow into the image and likeness of their parents. Our parent is God. And as with babies, the likeness will be filled out even more as we grow up and into it. In this month of thy holy souls, on this day of remembrance of those who died, especially in wars, lament is proper - because we're given the capacity to regret and to miss and to grieve; because we are given the capacity for friendship, comradeship and love. But lament is neither the whole story nor the end of the story.

For Christians, what the Church must affirm in the face of all suffering, all wars, and death, through all history – two World wars Korea, Vietnam, Iraq, Afghanistan, as well as all the allegedly minor and often forgotten incidents, conflicts and struggles that small and great cemeteries and well known and battlefields poignantly witness to – what the Church must affirm to itself and to the world is that God made us for himself; God made us in love; God chose to be among us; God suffered and died as one of us, and in Christ raises us with him, even as we stretch out our arms and say, “help us and save us now in this mortal life, now and at the hour of our death”: Lamentations 3:21: “This I call to mind and therefore have hope: the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases.”

Rest eternal grant to them, o Lord, and let light perpetual shine upon them. In Christ, his compassions, they fail not. Amen.