



Forgetting, Remembering, Anticipating

Isaiah 2:1-4; Revelation 21:9-27

'No more Remembrance Days.'¹ That was the title of an article written just over two years ago by the journalist Simon Jenkins, previously editor of the *Evening Standard* and *The Times* and now a columnist at *The Guardian*. The argument made in his column was that our tendency to look back to the conflicts of the past can lead to us sustaining animosities rather than seeking peace: 'We should not be remembering, but forgetting. Almost all the conflicts in the world are caused by too much remembering: refreshing religious divisions, tribal feuds, border conflicts, humiliations and expulsions. Why else but for memory does Sunni fight Shia or Hindu fight Muslim? India and Pakistan seem unable to get over memories of Partition. What ancient grievances motivated Myanmar's viciousness against the Rohingya?'

After commenting on the problems raised in other war zones, including the Balkans and Northern Ireland, Jenkins concludes his piece with a final, eloquent pleading for people to move on and look to the future: 'Remembering is easy. Forgetting is hard – in personal relationships as in a nation's collective response to the world around it. The task is not to ignore some past event but to view it in proportion, to find some compromise between present and past. Throughout history, societies that do this, that manage to "let the dead bury their dead", have tended to succeed and move forward. Those that cannot forget, that wander the stony paths of their past and drink at the rancid well of grievance, are those that decay from within.'

Jenkins' words are worth reflecting on at a time of the year when we are drawn back to the conflicts of the past, remembering the countless victims of historical conflicts such as the two World Wars of the 20th Century, while also praying for those presently suffering in places such as Syria and Yemen. As another Remembrance season concludes, we might want to consider, from a Christian perspective, how to find the proper balance between forgetting, remembering and anticipating.

Both the Old and the New Testament offer to us visions of a future when conflicts end, a peace and restoration from God which burns off all of the old animosities and hatreds of the past. Isaiah the Prophet wrote of a time when all nations would be gathered together in Mount Zion (2:1-4), later describing this moment as one which wasn't just limited to human reconciliation and would also bring an end to enmity between animals. 'The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat...' (see Isaiah 11:6-9).

¹ You can read the whole article here: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/nov/09/no-more-remembrance-days-consign-20th-century-history>

A similar vision is found at the end of the New Testament, where John the Revelator reports the vision he has of a *New Jerusalem*. The city he describes is huge, the ancient dimensions outlined in Revelation 21:16-17 translating, in modern terms, to a cube which is 1,500 miles high, wide and long. Why is the city so vast and spacious? Presumably, it's to accommodate all those who are welcomed in. Later, John describes the multicultural nature of the city, telling us that, 'The glory and honour of the nations will be brought into it' (Revelation 21:26).

Reconciliation between different groups of people was also an important part of the Apostle Paul's understanding of the difference made by Jesus. For Paul, peace between people who were previously at odds with each other was not just some future possibility but something happening in the here and now of life in the church. Slaves worshipped alongside the free, men and women joined together as well as Jews and Greeks, all of this made possible by Jesus: 'For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility' (Ephesians 2:14).

1. Do you agree with the suggestion that as a society we're too concerned with remembering the conflicts and differences of the past?
2. How is your understanding of an event like Remembrance changed by the vision of the future which we find in passages like Isaiah 2 and Revelation 21?
3. During Sunday's sermon, we spoke about the possibility of a 'culture war' in the United Kingdom, deepening political divisions which have intensified in recent years after the Brexit vote. What difference do these passages make to your response to these divisions?
4. Like any congregation, SBC is made of people with different political perspectives... Conservatives, Lib Dems and Labour, Brexiteers and Remainers... can you think of constructive ways in which we could acknowledge these differences while also remaining committed to loving each other in light of the love of God?

At the end of your time together, can you take time to pray for the issues raised in this study, for peace in areas of conflict, and for the divided politics of our own country?