

Homily – Sunday 12th November 2017 – Evensong

There is something deeply appropriate about this evening's gospel reading, that beautiful passage from John's gospel. We have reached the end of Remembrance Sunday, and each year this is surely a day which holds such mixed emotions. Whatever our personal perspective, it is impossible not to feel the pain and loss of war at this time when we commemorate those who have lost their lives in past conflicts as well as remembering that our service personnel continue to be active in different parts of the world and that they and their families continue to make sacrifices on behalf of our nation.

And in the middle of this emotional landscape we hear about love and friendship.

For me, the reminder of friendship is particularly poignant as we continue to commemorate the centenary of various battles of the First World War. As a history teacher I used to find that the stories of individuals were often the most engaging way to bring history alive for young people because they could identify so much more easily with real people than with grand concepts. One of the realities of the First World War was that young men signed up in the expectation of adventure and excitement, often with groups of friends – the Pals battalions. While the conditions in the trenches are unimaginable for us, those friendships were something which sustained the soldiers and so often they fought to protect and save one another as much as for the greater overall goals of the war.

The gift of friendship is something to be treasured. It is in our friendships that we learn so much about love. And once we are able to understand the love we can have for our friends, we gain a glimpse into the love God has for each one of us.

I wonder how easy you find the words of this evening's gospel reading, because they are spoken to each of us. To you and to me. This love is personal – it's not theoretical but entirely tangible. Whether we like it or not – whether we want it or not – God loves us. Uniquely and individually.

And once we grasp that – once we really understand that nothing can put us beyond God's love – then we simply can't fail to respond. By saying that, I don't mean to suggest that we don't get things wrong, or indeed that we only ever respond with love. But to know that we are known to our core and loved invites a loving response in return.

In wartime, that most extreme of circumstances, there will of course have been those occasions on which people feel they let one another down. But there were also extraordinary instances of courage, of people acting selflessly out of love for their comrades.

Today has been a day of remembrance. This evening, let us reflect on love and friendship. Let us dare to rest in the knowledge of God's love for us. And let's dare to consider what might be possible if each one of us responded to that love with love.

Amen