

Today is Remembrance Sunday. We gather here together, in this safe space, to remember. Individually. Collectively. Together.

All over Europe, the Commonwealth and beyond, Remembrance Sunday and Armistice Day are marked this week. People gather to remember the price of war, to honour those who gave their lives and to search for the path of peace.

This time last year Mayor Collins and I were preparing to travel to Paris, France to join in Remembrance with our town Fontenay-aux-Roses and their twin town in Germany. Fontenay-aux-Roses is a few miles just outside Paris, just like Elstree is a few miles from London. We travelled late on Sunday afternoon from Kings Cross by the Eurostar. We were met by our hosts at the Gare du Nord station in Paris and taken to our hotel for the ceremonies to begin the next day, Armistice Day, November 11<sup>th</sup>.

The next day was a busy day. It started with a cup of coffee and pastries at a local café. From there we all met outside the Town Hall, in the Public Square. It was drizzling, but not too bad. From there we walked in a dignified procession the short distance to the Town Cemetery. Local TV cameras and reporters were there. Local dignitaries, families, musicians. We walked round the cemetery, stopping for a moment at each grave of the brave soldiers who had died for peace in the two world wars of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Then we came back to the Town Square for a programme; laying wreaths, listening to music, listening to speeches, poems, singing. It was a great honour to represent everyone in Elstree and Borehamwood and to lay a wreath on behalf of our town. You will be very proud to know that your mayor last year, Mayor Collins, made his speech in French! There was youth choir from Germany and an accordion group from France.

Then we went indoors to the Town Hall where there was a splendid reception and plenty of French wine and a chance to meet and talk with people. In the evening, we all went out for a meal together. We made new friends.

After today's service we will walk down the Hill for our open-air Service of Remembrance at Elstree War Memorial. There we will gather with the whole village to remember, to lay our wreaths and to have a 2-minute silence. Thank you, St Nicholas School, for presenting such a splendid wreath of poppies this year. Thank you for your artwork. You do us proud.

Thank you, Naira and David, for reading your poems this morning so beautifully on behalf of your School. You help us remember.

Why do we remember wars? Wouldn't it be better to try and forget such terrible things? No.

We must remember so their sacrifice is honoured.

We must remember those who gave their lives for us.

We must remember their courage in standing up to a bully.

We must remember so there won't be another world war.

We must remember so their fight for peace will not be in vain.

On Remembrance Sunday I always think of 2 brothers, Leslie and Dennis.

Leslie and Dennis were born in Edmonton, London. Leslie was the oldest, Dennis a bit younger.

Dennis was still a boy when the second world war broke out. Like many children living in London, he was sent away to keep him safe. We call it evacuation. He was sent from London to South Wales where we went to school and was part of a loving family.

The other brother Leslie was a few years older. When war broke out, like many, he joined the British army. He was Lance Corporal in the King's Royal Rifles, the 60th Rifles, 2nd Battalion.

After a few months in the Army, Leslie's Battalion took part in the Defence of Calais. This was when British and Allied forces held back German forces to gain precious time and allow over 300,000 Allied forces to be rescued from Dunkirk a few miles away.

They fought bravely and for many days the battle raged.

Then sometime between May 23rd 1940 and May 29th 1940, Leslie lost his life in the Defence of Calais.

He laid down his life so that others might live and go free.

He laid down his life for his friends and for peace.

Leslie was my uncle.

Dennis was my father.

Leslie was only 21 when he died in France.

He never married. He never had children. I never met him.

He was only 21 when he lost his life at the defence of Calais in 1940.

His sacrifice meant that others lived.

When I met new friends in Paris last year I told them this story, and they told me theirs.

Remembering is a solemn duty and a choice.

We remember not so we can go back into the past in a time machine, but so we can let the past can journey towards us. Educate us, persuade us and ignite our hope for a better future.

I recently asked a class of schoolchildren, 'Do we live in a beautiful world?'

They all replied in unison, 'Yes!'.

I asked them 'Is there anything in the world that is not so beautiful?'

One child put up their hand and shouted out, 'War!'

I could see the look of recognition on the teachers' faces.

We all long for peace.

We carry the hope of peace deep within our hearts.

Like a candle flame that flickers, but can never be extinguished.

That lightens up the darkness.

We all long for the peace that ends the endless cycle of war and hostility.

That disrupts the manufacture of weapons of war.

That **'turns swords into ploughshares'**

That works towards sustainable development, civic trust, women's rights and education.

For peace in over 60 countries where we are still removing unexploded weapons and landmines that threaten life and limb.

For the Peace that makes new friends, builds new bridges and dreams new dreams.

Peace is made whenever we shake hands together, work together, laugh together, bury the hatchet together and let bygones be bygones.

We are better together. Peace is our birthright as human beings.

I hope this year you will join the Mayor of Hertsmere's Peace Walk on November 13<sup>th</sup> .....

Hear again the prophecy of Isaiah

**<sup>4</sup>they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.**

Hear again the promise of Psalm 46.

**'Come, behold the works of the Lord; see what desolations he has brought on the earth. He makes wars cease to the end of the earth; he breaks the bow and shatters the spear; he burns the shields with fire.'**

Hear again the blessing of Jesus:

**<sup>9</sup>"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.**

**Amen.**

## **Gather in our Hearts**

Gather in our hearts Lord  
Bring peace through our words.

Gather in our hearts Lord.  
Bring peace through our listening.

Gather in our hearts Lord.  
Bring peace through our actions.

Gather in our hearts Lord.  
Bring peace through our silence.

Gather in our hearts Lord.  
Bring peace through our lives.

## **Prayer for Remembrance Day**

For those who were killed in battle,  
For those who gave up their lives to save others  
For those who fought because they were forced to,  
For those who died standing up for a just cause  
For those who said war was wrong,  
For those who tried to make the peace  
For those who prayed when others had no time to pray  
For those creatures who needlessly die  
For those trees that needlessly are slaughtered  
For all of mankind

Let us quietly pray:

May your God hold them in peace  
May Love flow over the Earth and cleanse us all  
This day and for always.

*Marianne Griffin*

## **Lest We Forget**

What do we forget when we remember  
What are the stories left untold  
What do we think each November  
As we march down that glory road  
As we march down that gory road

One hundred million  
Don't come home from war  
Another eight hundred million  
Who lived to bear its scar  
Who lived to bear its scar

Lest we forget  
What they were dying for  
Lest we forget  
What they were killing for  
Lest we forget  
What the hell it was for

What do we forget when we remember...

*Owen Griffiths*

## **In Flanders Fields**

In Flanders fields the poppies blow  
Between the crosses, row on row,  
That mark our place; and in the sky  
The larks, still bravely singing, fly  
Scarce heard amid the guns below.  
We are the Dead. Short days ago  
We lived, felt dawn, saw the sunset glow,  
Loved and were loved, and now we lie  
In Flanders fields.  
Take up our quarrel with the foe:  
To you from failing hands we throw  
The torch; be yours to hold it high.  
If ye break faith with us who die  
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow  
In Flanders fields.

John McCrae

## **Remembered Still Those Souls**

Remembered still those souls who tried  
To save the world, but many died.  
A moment stolen for a tear,  
As we recall those unlived years.

The camaraderie that flew those souls back home to those they knew,  
And loved them dear and held them close  
But for our sakes released to foes  
The silence that they leave behind

Is space to calm the troubled minds of those they loved –  
And can't rewind.  
Again this day we give our thanks  
For those returned from serving ranks

And them 'as gave it all away  
Forever in our minds will stay.

*Ernie Rowe*