

*The Introduction to the City of Coventry Remembrance Sunday Service
at the War Memorial on 10th November 2019
by the Bishop of Coventry*

Lord Mayor, Deputy Lieutenant, Members of the City Council, Members of Her Majesty's Armed Forces and other uniformed bodies, distinguished guest, Mr Vladlen Kolesnikov, from our twin city of Volgograd, People of Coventry: I invite you to prepare for our city's Remembrance Service.

This wonderful park, where people walk and run, children play, and festivals celebrate our common life – this great space we enjoy together – was set aside in 1921 as a permanent memorial to honour the memory of some 40 million people killed or injured in the Great – and terrible – War that engulfed the world drawing the continent of Africa and the Indian sub-continent into the carnage. Muslims, Sikhs, Hindus joining Christians and those of no religious faith in battle-fields of blood and death.

So with generations before us we gather again in this park of peace, as the autumn leaves fall upon us, to remember with thanksgiving the fallen in war. And we hold in special and solemn remembrance those three and a half thousand Coventriens who gave their lives for our peace and freedom. They were followed by so many more in later wars and conflicts whom we remember today with great respect.

And, as ever, at this time of year, our minds recall and our hearts are moved by the cost of war paid by the civilians of Coventry, when countless bombs were visited on our city, killing hundreds, especially on the fateful night in November, in 1940 when so many were killed, half of our houses and two-thirds of our factories were damaged or destroyed, and our beautiful Cathedral reduced to ruins.

There is much talk today of our country being divided. And there is truth in that. People have deeply held opinions about the future of our nation. Some are passionate to leave the EU and frustrated that it hasn't happened yet. Others grieve at the prospect and still hope it may be averted. Others

just want a change of subject. Some will vote one way in the election. Some another way. Some will wonder, 'why bother?'

On this day it's worth reminding ourselves that none of us is perfect, none of us can see the whole picture. Some see from one angle, some from another. We need each other's perspectives, each other's views, so that we can come to a deeper understanding together to see the whole. Because each of us is different, each of us is necessary. We are incomplete without each other. And as they knew so well in the war, we stand or fall together.

And on this day of all days, we can see the price we pay – our families and cities, our nation and world – when disagreements between nations spiral out of control into conflict.

As we stand together, united in remembrance, respect and thanksgiving, we can see that there are deeper bonds that bind us together than the different opinions that might push us apart.

As we hold those who gave their lives for our freedom in our prayers; as we hear the words of Jesus, 'Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God; and as we commit ourselves to work for a just and peaceful world, we – though many – are one. We – though different – are the same. *One* in solemn and grateful remembrance of those lives that were lost that we may live. *One* in the *same* determination that our children and grandchildren and great grandchildren will live in peace with each other in our city, in our nation, in our world.

Let us stand together in the presence of God who created us in our differences and whose own Son laid down his life that we may live in peace and freedom together as one.