

Job 19.23-27a

I know that my Redeemer lives

Amington Parish Church

Sunday 10 November 2019

Remembrance Sunday

Death is nothing?

Some of you may recognise these words, from a famous poem by Henry Scott Holland:

Death is nothing at all.

It does not count.

I have only slipped away into the next room.

Nothing has happened.

Everything remains exactly as it was.

I am I, and you are you,

and the old life that we lived so fondly together

is untouched, unchanged.

Whatever we were to each other,

that we are still.

St Paul's Cathedral, May 1910

It is a poem that is often read at funerals. In fact, it isn't really a poem; it comes from a sermon preached after the death of King Edward VII in 1910.

And actually, when we read it on its own like this, we do Henry Scott Holland a great disservice. The section that is normally read says this:

Death is nothing at all...
it does not count...
nothing has happened...
everything remains exactly the same as it was...
untouched, unchanged.

Except that is simply not true. Death *is* something. It *is* hard, it *is* saddening, *it* is painful. It *does* count, because something *has* happened: our loved one is no longer with us. Something *has* changed; our lives *have* been touched.

Nowhere is this more true than when we reflect on and remember times of war. **Death is nothing at all?** Death in war is sometimes futile, a senseless waste of life and potential – but it is not *nothing*.

Yet actually in his sermon, Henry Scott Holland was contrasting the different ways we can feel after the loss of a loved one.

On the one hand, it is desperately painful, as someone we have known and loved is wrenched away from us. We can no longer enjoy their company, share their smile or their tears as we travel with them through the ups and downs of life. These are the times when we weep with sadness, when our hearts ache with the pain of loss and grief.

But on the other hand, in those moments when we are caught up in a treasured memory, when we remember how we were with one another, when we remember the twinkle in our loved one's eye, hear the sound of their laughter, or the rebuke of their sharp tongue; in those moments death does seem nothing at all. In those moments it is as if we are back in time, together again, untouched and unchanged by life's passing.

Bringing those two feelings together, allowing each to take hold of us in turn, neither denying our loss and our grief, nor refusing to remember in case it hurts; bringing both memories and grief together, is how we treasure and give thanks to God for the life of a loved one.

Job's Vision

The passage we heard just now, from the book of Job, helps us to understand this a bit more from a Christian perspective.

I hope none of us here ever suffers as Job did. A once rich and powerful man with many children, he lost everything: his children, his home, his wealth, his health – even his wife would have nothing to do with him. As we reach him in chapter 19, he is at his lowest point. His friends, instead of helping and supporting him, are accusing him, telling him it's all his fault. Some friends!

In that moment Job knew such pain, having lost everything. And yet, listen to what he has to say, in this darkest moment, at rock bottom, in that place of such pain and loss:

‘Oh, that my words were recorded,
that they were written on a scroll,
that they were inscribed with an iron tool on lead,
or engraved in rock forever!’

Job 19.23-24 (NIV)

Of course, they *were* recorded, and they *will* stand forever, which even words engraved in rock don't. If you've ever walked around an ancient graveyard, you'll know that if you leave a gravestone to the mercy of the elements, very quickly it becomes unreadable.

But these words *lift up the Bible* **will** stand forever. The words of the Bible are the most important words we could ever read or hear.

And listen to what Job says next:

'I know that my redeemer lives,
and that in the end he will stand on the earth.
And after my skin has been destroyed,
yet in my flesh I will see God;
I myself will see him
with my own eyes – I, and not another.
How my heart yearns within me!'

Job 19.25-27a (NIV)

In that moment of such pain and loss, Job sees a glimpse of a wonderful future. He sees God, his redeemer, standing on the earth, having healed all those who belong to him and made them whole again. Job's disease-ridden eyes are opened to see the beauty of God: no wonder his heart yearns within him.

Job is not made better in that moment. His pain is not taken away, it is not rubbed out – but neither is he ignoring it.

Instead Job sees above and beyond it, to the truth of God, who stands forever, the only one that lasts, the beginning and the end, the creator and sustainer of all. Job sees a glimpse of Jesus, the Redeemer who died and rose again so that, for all who believe in him, death is *not* the end, but the beginning of life with him, forever.

I trust that one day, God will bring peace and justice to the whole earth, he will bring healing to the nations, and there will be no more war or famine or disease: as Job says, **‘in the end he will stand on the earth... I will see him’**.

Yet he also said, **‘my redeemer lives’**. That is: he’s alive *today*. The good news of the Christian faith is that we don’t have to wait to know God. Whether our bodies are old, frail, healthy, or young – we can all, with the eyes of faith, see beyond this world of pale reflections, to the God who made *you*.

For Jesus is here now, and he promised to be with us *always*: in moments of sadness and grief, when death is all too real; and in moments of remembrance when death seems like nothing at all.

It is my prayer that in all those moments, we would all, like Job, have the eyes of faith, to see beyond the death of this world, to the truth of God's love and life and power to save – *you*.

Amen.

As we sit, we going to watch a video called 'Hope for the World's Despair – Hymn of Peace'. The words were commissioned and written specially for Remembrance Day, to a tune many of you will recognise. It is sung by Jonathan Veira.