

# **Sermon on Remembrance Sunday, 8 November 2020 by Rev. Wendy Sellers**

During the past few weeks, I've often wondered how people endured through the two world wars. I don't actually mean those who fought – because that endurance is beyond my imagining. I mean those who had to stay at home.

The reason this has been in my head is because I, personally, am finding the current situation very difficult; the uncertainty, the fear, the worry about loved ones, the restrictions, the lack of fun, the inability to plan. I find all that very hard, and I'm fairly confident I'm not alone here. Our current situation is well represented by the fact that for the first time in most of our adult lives, we are not with others marking Remembrance Sunday, at church or at a war memorial. We are in our homes.

Through two world wars, millions of people, perhaps even some of you when you were very young, lived through years of uncertainty, fear, worry, restrictions, limited fun and blighted plans – all much worse than anything I'm enduring now.

When we began the first lockdown in March we generally started with a spirit of optimism: a hope that we could conquer the virus and a vaccine would be along shortly. There was a feeling that we were all in this together and that together we could overcome. We had no real knowledge of second waves or what is now called 'long Covid'. I don't think we really understood what we were up against.

When Britain entered World War 1, the population was encouraged to believe that it would all 'be over by Christmas'. And yet, of course, that was not the case. There must have

been times when those who lived through those two world wars secretly or openly despaired that war would ever end, and peace would come.

Yet every war eventually ends and both World Wars eventually ended, too. Many died and many were wounded in those conflicts. And afterwards, those who survived rebuilt their homes, careers and lives. They remembered those who had not come home from the battle fields, along with those who, especially in World War 2, had died here at home on British soil. They nursed the walking wounded who bore the scars, seen or unseen, of war.

The current situation has given me a new respect for those who might be said to have fought on the 'home front' in the world wars. People who took on unfamiliar jobs or came out of retirement to cover vacancies left empty, as able-bodied men went to fight. Families who made do with what little they had, enduring scarcities we can barely imagine. Mothers who had to wave goodbye to their children as they were evacuated to the homes of strangers.

And in the past months we, too, have seen people step forward to take new roles. Retired health service professionals have re-joined the NHS. We have also seen families who are struggling to pay their bills and put food on the table. We have seen bravery and community spirit and found humour in dark situations.

In wartime Britain, through all the population endured, life continued. Babies were born, children were raised and educated. Families celebrated marriages and people died of natural causes. And Christmas was never, ever cancelled.

Every year, at this time, we rightly remember those who gave their lives fighting for our country. But, this year, I would like us also to remember those who stayed at home and tried to live ordinary lives in extraordinary situations. Those who got up each day, praying that the misery would end. Those who struggled to hope because things seemed hopeless. Those who feared to read the news or receive post. Those who tried to put on a cheerful face for the sake of others. Those who raised people's spirits and kept hope alive.

We should be inspired by them today. In the future, I guess people may wonder how we coped in this extraordinary time. A time when hope was in short supply, a time when the number of dying kept rising and no end was in sight. I hope they will remember us with pride.

At the core of any sacrifice lies unselfishness. A belief that the greater good comes before our personal needs. That others matter more than we do. That is the reason soldiers, sailors and airmen fought in the world wars and, indeed, subsequent conflicts. It is the reason the people left at home endured whatever they had to.

Putting us before Himself is the reason God came to earth as a baby and the reason Jesus died on a cross.

And that unselfishness is what must underlay our willingness to step up and face whatever is happening today and whatever lies before us.

This Remembrance Sunday is different. On Wednesday, the Queen was at Westminster Abbey laying a bouquet at the tomb of the Unknown Warrior, as she does every year. She was accompanied by just the Dean of the Cathedral and her equerry.

Her piper played from the organ loft. She looked resolute and alone. Perhaps, like us, she was remembering not only those who fought, but also the stay-at-homes who lived through war. Those who wept and quite possibly complained, but nonetheless got on with life. Those who still loved and laughed.

Let us also pray for those who today stay at home, while family members put themselves in danger to keep us all safe – whether in the military, the health services, the police or fire service, as aid workers and journalists or in roles we perhaps know little about.

As we remember the sacrifice of those who fought in the hope of peace, let's also promise to remember the sacrifices of the ordinary people, who stayed at home.

