

# **Sermon on Remembrance Sunday 2021**

## **by Rev. Bill Church**

The wonderful actor Alan Rickman, in his last film, took the part of a senior military officer and was given the line, which he delivered in his very distinctive voice: "Never presume to tell a soldier he does not know the cost of war." Implying that the nearer you get, the more you realise the cost.

The centurion in today's Gospel is, of course, a soldier. All we actually know of him is that he was posted to Capernaum, was concerned for the welfare of his servant and that the local people commended him for his generosity.

We can assume he was a long-serving legionary who had seen action in some of Rome's many military encounters, had gained promotion, knew the cost of war and was now happy to be in a relatively quiet billet. He was used to receiving orders and obeying them and when he gave orders, he expected them to be obeyed.

Any organisation handling struggle or emergencies must have something of that expectation. The centurion was expressing his faith in Jesus' healing power, but he was also stating a fact of life then and today.

Today we are regularly reminded to be careful about the words we use. There are pluses and minuses to that but it is

important. It is useful also to apply this discipline to Remembrance.

At times, there have been references to those remembered "laying down their lives" or "giving their lives". That is respectful but it is seldom accurate. They had their lives taken away from them. To quote my great-aunt talking about my uncle and his friends, "They did not want to die, you know." Obvious when you think about it but sometimes overlooked.

Very many combatants in the two world wars were not volunteers – they were conscripted. And civilians were caught up willy-nilly in the great battles and bombardments and suffered in enormous numbers. Some combatants remember a time of comradeship, travel and adventure; for others the whole experience was awful; and for many more it was a mixture.

Some did deeds of great courage, others just did what was demanded. But whether heroic or humdrum; victorious or defeated; volunteers or conscripts; willing or unwitting; in uniform or in civvies - today we remember all those who suffered, all who paid some of the cost of war.

And to extend our reflection and remembrance into the present day – consider those involved in combating Covid. There were a wonderful number of volunteers but most were health and care professionals striving to deal with the usual

urgencies and emergencies as well as this new and frightening threat, not always with the best equipment or protection. Doing their duty led to illness or even death for too many of them. All of them deserve to be remembered.

And the reading from Hebrews 12 urges readers to run the race of faith, inspired by a great cloud of witnesses. Perhaps this day should also remind us of the virtue of doing what is expected of us, be it hard or easy, glamorous or obscure, acknowledged or hidden, even if we might prefer to be somewhere else or doing something else.