I have been much troubled by the expectation that soon we shall be at war with the Iraq, & perhaps with the most of the Middle East.

I am troubled that since the end of the 2nd WW, British & commonwealth soldiers, sailors and airmen have engaged in 'small wars' to defend Britain's shrinking empire. From the insect ridden jungles of Malaya to the frozen hills of Korea, in the back streets of Aden & Cyprus, from the African bush of Kenya to the rain soaked Falklands. From the desert of Oman to the green fields of Ireland.

And each year since we claim to remember them, but sadly it seems only on one day in the year, and then for 2 minutes.

I found it profoundly difficult to prepare a suitable sermon, which would encourage us all to remember the terror of war, with the hope that we would not be tempted to again command young women & men to give up their lives before their time.

However through the thoughts and words of Tom Crotty, Seigfried Sasson and Rupert Brooke I have found a voice.

It has been 57 years since the end of WW2 and 84 years since the Armistice in 1918 that brought that most brutal and vicious of wars, the Great War to a merciful close.

Much has been written and broadcast over the years about the First World War and the horrors of trench warfare. The passage of 84 years has wiped the experience from the consciousness of most the population as those with direct experience are now a very few and will soon be gone altogether. We therefore rely on written memories to keep fresh in our minds the true horrors of that war - and it is right that we should remember - for it is only by remembering that a slight glimmer of hope remains that one day we may learn to avoid the same mistakes again, and again… Let us hope that it is this year that we learn!!

There can be few better ways to remember than through the words of the poets of that war - men such as Seigfried Sassoon and Wilfred Owen and I hope you will bear with me as I read a short poem by Sassoon that brings to life the fear and terror that was the daily experience of the men in the trenches of Flanders, and perhaps some here this morning This poem is called 'Attack'.

At dawn the ridge emerges massed and dun
In the wild purple of the glow' ring sun,
Smouldering through spouts of drifting smoke that shroud
The menacing scarred slope; and, one by one,
Tanks creep and topple forward to the wire.
The barrage roars and lifts. Then, clumsily bowed
With bombs and guns and shovels and battle gear,
Men jostle and climb to meet the bristling fire.
Lines of grey, muttering faces, masked with fear,
They leave their trenches, going over the top,
While time ticks blank and busy on their wrists,
And hope, with furtive eyes and grappling fists,
Flounders in mud. Oh Jesus, make it stop!

An article in the paper recently said that the four years trench warfare that made up the Great war could never happen today - not because the weapons have changed - which they clearly have, but because the people have changed. We now live in a very different society than existed in 1914. The concept of deference has gone from our lives.

The belief that someone in authority must know best has been replaced by a questioning and doubting that puts our leaders down rather than on a pedestal.

We now know with the benefit of hindsight that Haig and the other generals fought a futile war and sacrificed the lives of so many and if it were happening today with live BBC and CNN reports from the front it would not be tolerated. But in 1914, such thoughts existed only in the minds of a tiny minority and the authority of the generals was absolute.

Now no amount of historical analysis of the tactical shortcomings of the campaign on the Western Front can detract for one moment from the heroism and courage of those that lived in those miserable trenches and then summoned every residual drop of strength to haul themselves over the top and into the horrors of the battlefield that Sassoon so graphically described for us in his poem. Sitting here to day in comfort and security we cannot begin to imagine what went through the minds of those men as they were driven towards their death, … for our sakes, their children and their grandchildren.

These thoughts of sacrifice should for all Christians bring us back to the ultimate sacrifice that Jesus willingly made for us all on the battlefield of Calvary. Jesus gave his life not only for his friends but also for his enemies. As God, he had no need to experience human suffering but he did for all our sakes.

The former Bishop of Birmingham, Bishop J L Wilson, who was a Japanese prisoner of war in the Second War recommends three thoughts for us all to carry in our hearts on Remembrance Sunday and I also commend them to you now.
First recognising that all war is a failure
" Thankfulness for our deliverance and the sacrifice of others
" Penitence for human sin and evil
" Dedication to work for peace and justice in the world

I started with a poem by one of the great First World War poets and it seems apt to finish with another - this time by Rupert Brooke. This is one you will I'm sure know and it is called 'The Soldier'

If I should die, think only this of me:
That there's some corner of a foreign field
That is forever England. There shall be
In that rich earth's a richer dust concealed;
A dust whom England bore, shaped, made aware,
Gave, once, her flowers to love, her ways to roam,
A body of England's, breathing English air,
Washed by the rivers, blest by suns of home.

And think, this heart, all evil shed away,
A pulse in the eternal mind, no less
Gives somewhere back the thoughts by England given;
Her sights and sounds; dreams happy as her day;
And laughter, learnt of friends; and gentleness,
In hearts at peace, under an English heaven.
PAUSE…….

I call upon all Cxtns to please pray for world leaders, for Sad. Huss. Geor.Bush & Tony Blair that they may seek justice, peace & mercy.

Please pray that should we go to war that young men & women may meet with Jesus Christ as they meet the reality of war, & for the ordinary civilians like you & I who may suffer as a result of terror strikes will some how also meet with Jesus the prince of peace.

**Rick Gates**