

'There but not there' - Remembrance Sunday (with the First Hove Scout Group)

Jonah 3.1-5,10

Hebrews 9.24-28

Mark 1.14-20

Last Sunday, during the service, a little boy sat down in one of the chairs in church that has an outline or silhouette of a person on it. Did you notice them when you came in? Perhaps you are sitting next to one? They are part of a nationwide art installation called *There but not There*. It is to remember all those who died in the First World War which ended 100 years ago today. And not just that war, but the victims of all wars.

Most churches, like ours, contain lists of the people in the parish who died during the war. It's easy to walk past and not notice them. But with these figures you bump into something solid. It's like when you visit a war cemetery where you see hundreds of white gravestones. They make us stop. Ponder. Ask why. They make the dead more present, more alive.

At the same time, because the figures are see-through, it is a more hidden presence. Like the dead in our memories and hearts. We don't see them clearly. The transparent nature of the figures also allows each of us to have a different response to them. They don't force us to think only one way. I wonder, what did you think about them when you came in? One child last week said, quite straightforwardly, 'Look a ghost.'

This is what makes them art. Good art shows us something solid, even difficult, about reality, but allows us to discover it in our own way. Good art frees us; takes us more deeply into things, ourselves, the world. It sets our imaginations free to think about things like war and death, peace and life.

The little boy I mentioned noticed the figures. He wanted to take a closer look. Before his parents could whisk him away, he leant back and was surrounded by the silhouette. At that same moment, the light in the church caught the figure and it shone brightly. Suddenly, in the middle of the church was a boy surrounded by the shining silhouette of an adult.

What was might this be an image of? Let's allow our imaginations to wander (wonder).

Perhaps, it's an image of the boy and his parent. Each of us is surrounded by the love and care of our parents, family, and others who, even when they are not with us, hold us and support us. They are there, but not there. This reminds us that for each person who dies in war they leave behind devastated families.

Perhaps, it's an image of the boy and his future, all the things he might grow up to be. He may be a beaver, cub or scout one day. Perhaps he will become a musician, a father, a fisherman.... But just as the silhouette is see-through, it's not yet clear who he will become. The boy's future is there, but not there. Just as the world's future may contain peace or war. And, as we remember those who die in war, we can think of all the things they will never have the chance to do, and what we owe them for all that they had to sacrifice.

Perhaps, it's an image of the boy's soul. The boy is not just a body, or a mind, but a whole person with body, mind, and heart. This way of seeing the whole person is what we mean by someone's soul. Even if I know lots of facts about you, there is always more discover. It is because we have a soul that we delight in beauty, love, think, dream, make promises, try to do good, battle for justice, seek truth. Our souls can also be hurt by violence, hatred and lies. The soul is a way of saying that every person matters. It's why each person's death is so sad; why we remember those who have died. The soul is right there in the face of each person, but it is also not there.

Perhaps, it's an image of the way the boy (or girl or anyone at all) is held by God. God is always present to us in our very existence, but in a way that is not visible. But invisible things really matter too. Like our soul. Like good stories. Like love, courage, friendship, peace, and kindness. God also sends us invisible help. Another child who came to church last week said it's a guardian angel. Better still, perhaps it is an image of how God is present to the boy in Jesus. We heard in our Gospel reading how Jesus calls people to follow him. Jesus is there, but also not there because he wants us look for him and become more like him.

One of the ways that little boy, and any one of us, can be like Jesus is in the way we remember others, especially those who we might forget because it's too difficult to think of them, like those who have died in terrible wars.

In our remembrance service today, we do this not just by using words but also by doing certain meaningful things that give people space and freedom to remember in their own way. This is one reason we keep two minutes silence.

But today, and every Sunday, we also do something else, we receive something more solid that both gives us freedom and space and also brings us closer together.

We go up to the altar to receive bread and wine.

We do this because Jesus told his followers to do this in remembrance of him. Every time we do this Jesus promises he will be with us and bring us closer to God. When we do this, we join God's way of not just remembering but celebrating every single soul.

How does this happen? Well it's a mystery. It's like a good piece of art that calls to our freedom and imagination, only here God is the artist.

So let's use our imaginations one last time.

Just like the light catches the outline of the silhouettes and makes the presence of the dead soldiers more real, and just like the little boy's whole life, family and future shine out, so simple wine and bread catches the divine light and becomes full of Jesus' presence. He's there, but not just there, but everywhere, and beyond.

We can take this light into our bodies and souls so that in our lives we shine with the love of God who never forgets anyone; so that we can say with our whole heart and soul, and in all truth and hopefulness: 'We will remember them.'