

**A sermon preached by Emma Hodge at St. Michael and All Angels Church, Sandhurst on
10th November 2019**

May the words of my lips and the thoughts and meditations of all our hearts be always acceptable in thy sight O Lord our strength and our redeemer

For this sermon, I want you to hold a poppy in your hands and feel free to look at it during the sermon

On this remembrance Sunday where we remember all those who have died in wars and conflicts, on active service, we are often inclined to look at the world today and remember with sadness that war is still going on and our service personnel are deployed in areas of the world where they help to keep the peace.

The poppy has become a symbol of those who have died on active service, after the first world war when John McCrae wrote his now famous poem "In Flanders Field"

The armed forces who fought and died in the various conflicts are often described as giving their lives in the service of their country.

Service to country is not the only kind of service, another kind of service is service to God.

Throughout his life, Jesus demonstrated service to God the father and he was willing to be obedient in carrying out that service, even obedient to death. In a few moments, as we share the Eucharist, we recall and reflect that the bread and wine become symbols of the body and blood of Jesus Christ. And reminders of the price that Jesus paid for his life of service

The death of Jesus upon the cross is a symbol of the price that Jesus paid in obedience of service to God. The cross, a symbol of suffering, is also a symbol of obedience.

With any kind of service, there is often a price, that price may be small, but it can be significant. Our armed forces often pay the price of service, either with their lives or with significant mental or physical health problems and this also can affect their families and friends.

When we look at the poppy, the symbol of those who have died in wars, we notice that the centre of the poppy is black. **Black is a colour associated with mourning, despair and often depression.**

Our Old Testament reading was from Job and Job was no stranger to these feelings. He did have a successful life with plenty of loving family, however he never forgot that God was above him. And then everything went badly for Job; his children died, his life-stock was killed, his health failed (I did say everything went badly for him!). Then his friends and wife encouraged him to abandon his God he responded with the words *“I know that my redeemer lives and that at the last he shall stand upon the earth”* In the Old Testament world, a redeemer is someone who was with you during difficult times, they would be a facilitator during dispute meetings as well as providing ways out of difficult circumstances. When Job spoke these words, he had a clear picture of an earthly redeemer. In Job's darkest moment he clung to his faith in God and that he was not alone or abandoned, that there was a redeemer who would help him.

The verse from Job has famously been set to music by Handel in his Oratorio the Messiah, When Handel set the words to music he had the view that the redeemer was Jesus Christ. The verse that looks to Jesus both as someone who will be with us at the difficult times of our lives but also looking forward to Jesus' return as king.

Our Gospel reading from Luke chapter 20 is part of a longer passage where Jesus authority and teaching are questioned. This time the question is about life after death. As is explained in the passage, the people who asked the question do not believe in life after death but they asked the question anyway. Jesus confirmed that there is life after death and each week we confirm this when we say the creed “We look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come”.

As Christians we have a promise of life after death, a life, which will be very different from this worldly life, in simple terms, a heavenly life, in answering the Sadducees question, Jesus explains that the resurrection of the dead will occur and that there will be immortal life.

This is hope, We have hope that in the midst of suffering there is a redeemer. We have hope that there is resurrection of the dead. We have hope that there is life after death. We have hope that we will see God at the end.

As we remember the sacrifice of our armed forces. Let us remember that Christ gave us the example for service and Job gave us the example of holding onto our faith in difficult times. May we know that Christ is our Redeemer and that at the end he shall stand upon the earth and let us rejoice in the hope that is provided in the resurrection.

When you come up for communion you may like to leave your poppy by either the war memorial or by the Perspex silhouette next to the pulpit (choir, please leave yours on the altar)