



St Marylebone  
Parish Church

## Remembrance 2022

*No man is an island, Entire of itself, Every man is a piece of the continent, A part of the main.*

*If a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less. As well as if a promontory were. As well as if a manor of thy friend's Or of thine own were:*

*Any man's death diminishes me, Because I am involved in mankind, And therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; It tolls for thee.<sup>i</sup>*

John Donne, the extraordinarily complex scholar, adventurer, MP, love poet, depressive and priest, wrote those words in 1624. At first, the words did not form part of a poem but were part of a prose essay, a 'Meditation'<sup>ii</sup> in his 1624 book, *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions*, prose written as a reflection upon sickness, pain, death and resurrection.

John Donne knew a lot about death, not just 'natural' death something with which everyone in 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> England was all-too familiar, but about death in acutely painful and all-too-personal ways.

When he was four year's old, his father died. Later, several of Donne's friends and close relatives were killed or exiled because they refused to take the Oath of Supremacy. Donne himself had

been denied a degree by the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge because he had refused to swear the Oath, and his brother, having been tortured for harbouring a recusant priest, whom he later betrayed, had been imprisoned in Newgate where he died of the bubonic plague.

In the face of all of this death, Donne, chose to swear the Oath of Supremacy and was duly rewarded, not least with the Deanery of St Paul's, although in so doing, something within him seems to have died.

Jonne Donne knew, that each and every death he had witnessed, along with each and every personal compromise that he had made, diminished him, took something away from him that could never be retrieved nor regained.

Mediation 17, is Donne's reflection upon the complete interconnectedness of all things; not so far removed from St Paul's great assertion that, *"For as in one body we have many members, and all the members do not have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another."*<sup>iii</sup>

After years of societies having the luxury to get away with adopting the motto *"its all about me!"*, the past few years have, increasingly, made those with eyes to see and ears to hear, realise that everything is not about them. That we are, each and every one of us, part of a whole, that we are all involved in mankind and that mankind is, inextricably, involved in us.

An economy fails in west Africa and someone with a name and a story ends up living in a hostel on my street, if not washed up on my favourite beach.

A complex despot seeks to annex land, and I have to pay four times as much for my gas and electricity.

My demand for palm oil or roasted almond milk, annihilates an indigenous people in the Amazon and an island in the southern Pacific is flooded and becomes uninhabitable.

It is not just that butterflies beat their wings and the course of a tornado can be altered.<sup>iv</sup> My every choice and action will, at some point, affect someone else. And other people's choices and actions will inevitably affect me, my children, my grandchildren. We are, perhaps, maybe too late, beginning to wake up to the fact that *no man is an island*; that we are *part of a continent, part of the main*.

Everything is connected to everything else, everyone is connected to everyone else, there is no such thing as independence; it really isn't "*all about me*", my needs, my rights.

Global warming; the war in Ukraine; the firing of intercontinental ballistic missiles from North Korea over Japan into the Pacific; who chairs the meetings of the Cabinet in Downing Street really do affect me and they are affected by me: my choices, my actions, whether I chose to-do, or not-to-do anything.

Remembrance Sunday is, therefore, about so much more than the ghost of a man standing in a field of poppies in Flanders<sup>v</sup>; the great and the good standing in Whitehall alongside a block of Portland Stone; Remembrance Sunday is everyone's chance to stop for two minutes and remember that *No man is an island, that he is part of the main.*

Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> Donne, J., *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions*, 1624

<sup>ii</sup> Meditation 17

<sup>iii</sup> Cf. 1 Cor.12: 12-31; Romans 12: 4-5

<sup>iv</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Butterfly\\_effect](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Butterfly_effect)



<sup>v</sup> Bran Symmondson, *Remembrance*, 2014