



St Marylebone  
*Parish Church*

## **Remembrance Sunday 2024**

It would, they said, be “all be over by Christmas”, of course, it was not, and the wishful thinking of 1914 turned very sour through the long-drawn-out warfare which dragged on painfully and wearily until the Armistice was signed on 11<sup>th</sup> November 1918. More than 40 million people dead or wounded.

Even as the ink on the ceasefire treaty was drying, the "war that will end war" was already opening up new fronts where yet more violence, more death, would be witnessed, not only in Europe but far beyond its shores.

By 25<sup>th</sup> October 1922, the Russian Civil War would claim more Russian lives than the Great War itself; the collapse of the Ottoman Empire would witness the slaughter and displacement of hundreds of thousands of civilians; Ireland would be partitioned bloodily and painfully, new nations would be born and old nations restored, and even more blood would be shed, and yet more people would be displaced. Indeed, the years following 1918 were far deadlier than the years of the Great War itself.

Imposed rather than negotiated peace treaties and spitefully punitive reparations would, eventually, bring about the collapse

not just of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, but of the British Empire too.

The American Empire would emerge victorious out of the ashes of Europe and the rise of Fascism would reshape a continent, and the struggle for a new world order would go on to engulf not only the old battlefields of Europe, but the jungles of Burma, the islands of the South Pacific and the ancient and emerging Empires of the East.

There has not been a single year without a war since the signing of the Armistice in a railway carriage in the Rethonde Clearing in the Forest of Compiègne.

“All over by Christmas” – I think not!

The sound of the shot fired by Gavrilo Princip at Archduke Franz Ferdinand on June 28<sup>th</sup>, 1914, has already been echoing for 110 years and it will, I fear, keep on echoing and resonating through the world for many years to come.

Even today, as we gather in central London, people will die and be wounded in Lebanon, Gaza, Israel, Yemen, Sudan, Ukraine. And it is not only in these now-well-known places where people will die today.

Conflict rates throughout the world continue to get worse year on year and, tragically, of the 50 countries ranked at the top of the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data index<sup>ii</sup>, well over half – 39 – are currently experiencing sustained or escalating levels of conflict.

Yet, nobody 'wants' war – why would they? But critical mistakes which lead to conflict, and which can, all too easily escalate into full-blown war, are made over and over and over again.

Leaders refuse to learn from the mistakes leaders before them have made<sup>iii</sup>; they refuse to learn from the all-too-costly errors of history, they fail to weigh up the costs of venturing, sometime all too literally, into territory they do not understand - with the most disastrous and catastrophic consequences.

The 8<sup>th</sup> Century BC prophet Micah, a contemporary of Isaiah, Amos and Hosea, tried to change what looked like an inevitable trajectory into war, defeat and exile in his day, by reminding the rulers of Judah – and their people – that what God requires of his people is what makes for peace: not bluff nor bluster, not untrammelled pride nor hubris, not making the same mistakes as those made time and time before, but living justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly with God<sup>iv</sup>.

During the middle years of the Great War, the duplicitous British High Commissioner in Egypt reached a secret agreement with the Sharif of Mecca<sup>v</sup>. The Sharif kept his word. The British did not. Almost a hundred years later we can trace a direct line of consequence from the actions of Sir Henry McMahon to the obscene attacks carried out by Hamas on 7<sup>th</sup> October 2023 and the resulting almost complete obliteration of parts of the Gaza Strip.

And it might not be too hard to see how the arrival of North Korean troops in Ukraine in the past few weeks has its roots in the hubris of General Douglas MacArthur who, in 1950, ignored the warnings about the North Korean military buildup near the

38<sup>th</sup> Parallel border and failed to follow President Truman's wish to negotiate a ceasefire.

Death and destruction continue.

When will we learn *to learn*; when will we begin to act justly, love mercy and walk humbly - not just with God but with our neighbour? Then and only then, perhaps, will God's Kingdom come and the earth and its people will be free from the reverberations of bullets and bombs and know the sound of peace.

**The Revd Canon Dr Stephen Evans**

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<sup>i</sup> Wells, H. G., *The War That Will End War*, 1914

<sup>ii</sup> <https://acleddata.com/>

<sup>iii</sup> Petraeus, D., & Roberts, A., *Conflict: A Military History of the Evolution of Warfare from 1945 to Gaza*, William Collins, 2024

<sup>iv</sup> Micah 6.8, "... what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"

<sup>v</sup> Shambrook, P., *The Policy of Deceit: Britain and Palestine, 1914 – 1939*, Oneworld Academic, 2023