

...AND IN THE MORNING

Our Morning Service draws the overnight vigil to a close and anticipates the moment the Battle of the Somme began, at 7-28am on 1st July 1916. This morning that moment will be marked by the firing of the One o'Clock Gun, and after joining in the national two minutes silence that follows, a whistle that was once used to summon troops out of their trenches at the Somme will be sounded, to conclude our whole commemoration.

INTRODUCTION

This morning's bugle call, as with yesterday evening's, is a traditional call to parade. But on this particular morning it is also a call to mind that exactly one hundred years ago Zero Hour was rapidly approaching, the moment when the tumultuous Battle of the Somme would begin. And it calls us to the solemn remembrance that by the end of this first day, the blackest day ever in the history of the British Army, 19,200 British soldiers would be dead, with a further 40,000 wounded or missing. Many of them were Scots and most of them fell within the first hour and within the first hundred yards of No Man's Land.

READING

Romans 8: 31-39

With all this in mind, asks St Paul in his letter to the Romans, what are we to say? If God is on our side, who is against us? He did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all; how can he fail to lavish every other gift upon us? Who will bring a charge against those whom God has chosen? Not God, who acquits! Who will pronounce judgement? Not Christ, who died, or rather rose again; not Christ, who is at God's right hand and pleads our cause! Then what can separate us from the love of Christ? Can affliction or hardship? Can persecution, hunger, nakedness, danger or sword? 'We are being done to death for your sake all day long,' as scripture says; 'we have been treated like sheep for slaughter' - and yet, throughout it all, overwhelming victory is ours through him who loved us. For I am convinced that there is nothing in death or life, in the realm of spirits or superhuman powers, in the world as it is or the world as it shall be, in the forces of the universe, in heights or depths – nothing in all creation that can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

REFLECTION

Centuries before the First World War, on the morning of the Battle of Edgehill in the English Civil War, the Royalist commander famously uttered the following prayer: "O Lord, Thou knowest how busy I must be this day. If I forget Thee, do not Thou forget me." The list of names of the Scottish Regiments deployed in the Battle of the Somme is in itself a roll call of our nation's proud military history, and a reminder of all those who were busy this day, of all those we can not and must not forget. The Scots Guards, The Royal Scots, The Seaforth Highlanders, The King's Own Scottish Borderers, The Gordon Highlanders, The Cameronians (Scottish Rifles), The Black Watch, The Cameron Highlanders, The Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, The Royal Scots Fusiliers, The Highland Light Infantry. They all served and they all suffered losses, some more than others. Take the 16th Battalion Highland Light Infantry for instance, a Boys' Brigade Battalion from Glasgow which lost 20 officers and 534 men; and more locally to Edinburgh, McCrae's Battalion of the Royal Scots, which famously included the Hearts football team among many other sportsmen, suffered 75% losses on this first day alone: 12 officers and 573 men. In the course of the whole battle,

which lasted until November, thousands of Scots were killed. Many of them lie buried in the immaculate war cemeteries of Northern France; many of them have no known grave and are simply named in the vast memorial at Thiepval. They are all named here, every last one of them, in the Scottish National War Memorial, on the rolls of honour which were placed in the casket in the shrine at the heart of the memorial, fixed to the Castle rock itself and embedded forever in our national identity. This morning of all mornings we honour their memory, we give thanks for their ultimate sacrifice and we commend them to the continuing care and keeping of Almighty God. When he wrote his letter to the Church in Rome, to Christians facing the very real prospect of terrible slaughter, St Paul reminded them that whatever dangers they faced, through persecution, hunger, nakedness, danger or sword, nothing – not even death itself - could separate them from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Many of the soldiers preparing to go over the top and into the valley of the shadow of death when the whistles blew on that fateful morning would have relied on that same reminder, that there was nothing in death or life, nothing in all creation, that could ever separate them from the love of God in Christ Jesus their Lord. In that same eternal assurance we sing now to God's praise in that most Scottish of psalms, to the tune Crimond, The Lord's my Shepherd:

HYMN

The Lord's my Shepherd, I'll not want.
He makes me down to lie
In pastures green: he leadeth me
The quiet waters by.

My soul he doth restore again;
And me to walk doth make
Within the paths of righteousness,
Even for his own Name's sake.

Yea, though I walk in death's dark vale,
Yet will I fear none ill:
For thou art with me; and thy rod
And staff me comfort still.

My table thou hast furnishèd
In presence of my foes;
My head thou dost with oil anoint,
And my cup overflows.

Goodness and mercy all my life
Shall surely follow me:
And in God's house for evermore
My dwelling-place shall be.

PRAYERS

Eternal God, our refuge and strength,
on this day we remember before you all who experienced the Battle of the Somme:
those who faced the terrible waste and devastation,

who fought against all the odds, endured the clinging mud, and the squalor of the trenches. We recall with thanksgiving the loyalty shown to comrades and the bravery of those who overcame their fear, the courage of those who daily faced the pounding of artillery, gun-fire and shrapnel. May we never forget the devastating loss of this battle, the anxiety on the home-front, and the sacrifices that were made.

Through our remembrances today, strengthen our resolve to oppose naked aggression, to defend the weak, and to speak your word of peace in times of conflict and insecurity.

O God our light and our defence, breathe your gentle Spirit over the wastes of our world. God of love, protect our memories from the infection of hate, that we may live free from fear and resentment. May the light of Christ lead us out of the valley of the shadow of death onto paths of reconciliation, forgiveness and peace for the sake of the world your Son came to save.

Lord, God of the nations, we easily forget those who are the victims of war. Forgive the wrath of the nations, the desire to build empires and to seek domination over others. May your mercy be upon all who have suffered the ravages of war; soothe their sorrows and heal their memories. Restrain the impulse to seek revenge, and by your grace may we find forgiveness in our hearts. Strengthen our wills to do good and not harm, to care and not to destroy, and bring good out of evil. We make this prayer in the name of the one who endured the cross and was victorious over sin and death, Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Bring us, O Lord God at our last awakening,
into the house and gate of heaven:
to enter into that gate, and dwell in that house,
where there shall be no darkness nor dazzling, but one equal light;
no noise nor silence, but one equal music;
no fears nor hopes, but one equal possession;
no foes nor friends, but one equal communion,
in one equal eternity,
in the habitation of your glory.

Teach us good Lord, to serve thee as thou deservest; to give and not to count the cost; to fight and not to heed the wounds; to toil and not to seek for rest; to labour and not to ask for any reward, save that of knowing that we do thy will. Amen.

ACT OF REMEMBRANCE

7-24

As we leave Crown Square shortly, the piper will play "The Battle of the Somme". But for now, as we come to our Act of Remembrance here in Edinburgh we are conscious of those who will share in the two minutes silence, in London and Cardiff and in Northern Ireland and perhaps especially in Northern France. In these national commemorations as in so many more local ones across the country today, we are bound together with the jarring images of the waste and ruin of war imprinted on our minds and imaginations, as we gather to remember all those who were involved in the Battle of the Somme. We honour the memory of those who inhabited that war-shattered landscape, those who endured the mud and the blood; those who showed great courage and loyalty to comrades at arms; those who saw the unspeakable sight of bodies broken; those whose minds were numbed by the noise of bombardment, and those

whose eyes saw the ugliness of disfigured, weeping and frightened faces. For all who were engaged in combat, those who tended the maimed and injured, the fallen, and for those families who through faded photographs and forgotten stories still cherish the memory and example of their forebears, we ask for God's goodness and mercy, and for ourselves, the grace to remember.

- 7-26 Piper's Lament
- 7-27 Binyon's Lines
- 7-28 The Firing of the Gun
The Two minutes silence
- 7-30 The sounding of a whistle.

THE BENEDICTION

God grant to the living, grace; to the departed, rest; to the Church, The Queen, the Commonwealth, and all people peace and concord; and to us and all his servants, life everlasting; and the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, descend upon you and remain with you and with all whom you love and serve and pray for, this day and every day and always.

Amen.