

SERVICE TO COMMEMORATE START OF WW1

August 3rd/4th - Buxworth/Hayfield

JOEL 2:1-3,12-13

ROMANS 8:31-38

LEARNING TO DEPEND

I saw a very small girl, perhaps just 2 years old, proudly holding out a carrier bag for her parents with two hands, so they could put bits of rubbish into it which she then took towards the bin without help.

Independence and achievement are things we prize in society and the path to managing things on your own and being able to produce good results starts from a very young age.

Schools are expected to publish their results and get an ever higher percentage of good grades; jobs have inbuilt targets to reach; getting your own home is high priority for lots of young people. Independence and achievement are prized- as they should be.

But in Wartime we get perhaps one of the clearest impressions of how people often had to let go of independence and very humbly and completely depend on each other and on God.

On the battlefield men had even less hope of staying alive if they didn't trust their comrades and their officers; at Home, neighbours couldn't have functioned if they hadn't helped in the work and looking after family and shared in the emotions of waiting and worrying and mourning; and as the 'War Horse' story has made clear both on the stage and in film, many people had to rely on their animals both for work and in War.

People learnt to take their own responsibilities but they recognised they could only do it with a healthy dose of dependence on each other – and on God, as well.

In the Bible, the man Joel gave a strong warning of the horrors of a

battle to come. Blow a trumpet, sound an alarm; let everyone know that a horrendous time is coming. It was known as the 'Day of the Lord'. In fact it was a time of judgment and disaster after long, long times of warning and urging people to sort themselves out and get their act together by living the ways God told them to live. They hadn't listened. They had gone on glibly. Now, after enough warnings, it would happen and they'd be swamped, in fact, by a plague of locusts so vast that it would be like an army.

It's going to be dark and black and just like the dawn, although it starts gradually it will eventually take over and affect the whole of life. It will be like an army the size of which you've never seen, that eats everything up; The symbols keep on coming: it will be like fire everywhere you turn, or like horses and cavalry. Look in front and everything is as beautiful as Eden at the beginning of time but look behind and you'll see the devastation they leave.

That's war for you, too. Taken over by blackness, destruction of what's beautiful and normal and wholesome.

But there is a hope. God says 'Even now, return to me' Yet it needs to be an honest realistic turning to God. Look at yourselves and how you've been, how you've behaved; look at how it's impossible for you to save yourselves; and if your tears are wholeheartedly for sadness at it all, and you want to make a change, then this God who is 'abounding in love', who is gracious, generous and compassionate, will relent.

When there's no way out, depend on God and stop thinking you can manage it all yourself. You can't.

Although there were just as many views about the Bible in 1914 as there are now, it's perhaps true to say that more people relied on it than do now. It had been part of the standard kit of the British soldier since 1825, under the instructions of the Duke of York, the army's commander in chief.

It was not uncommon to find a man sitting on the fire-step of the Frontline trenches reading one of the small copies of the new Testament which were issued to the troops by the people at home' said a General of the Ulster Division.

On the first day of the Battle of the Somme it was reported that: *the wounded who could not be brought in had crawled into shell holes, wrapped their waterproof sheets around them, taken out their Bibles and died like that'*

Yes, there were some who thought it was just useful to have a bible because it might stop a bullet. But perhaps there were more who reached that point that when they couldn't save themselves it was a time for depending on God to save their souls, if nothing else.

In Jesus' own time in Israel he told people that anyone with ambition needed to take the example of little children who just trust; he said the wealthy put too much value in possessions and the influential had too much reliance on their position; He talked about grace – undeserved generosity and encouraged people to admit their faults. *Then* they would know real dependence, then they would find real hope in situations where they had no chance of saving themselves.

'If God is for us, who can be against us?' wrote St Paul. He didn't spare even his own Son....that shows his love and his resurrection shows his power. Nothing, says Paul, can keep us from God's love, however dark and dire it may be. There's just too much of it.

So in our days, when we encourage independence, achievements, standing on your own two feet, managing, succeeding....I don't think it's a bad thing to be reminded that there are times when we are not capable of doing any of that and even to try may be to create its own stress and strain. Let's learn again to depend on one another and not be ashamed of it. Let's learn to depend on God. When there is nothing else left to rely on as we face our own personal battles, we may find a hope for salvation. The Bible may indeed stop the bullets.