



## Remembrance Day again

Remembrance Days between 2014 and 2018 carried huge First World War resonance, as we journeyed a century on through the outbreak of war, through Ypres, the Somme and Passchendaele and finally reached the Armistice. There was something electrifying about the silence last year at 11am, one hundred years after peace intruded upon the war to end all wars.

This year, what do we think about?

Well of course, there is still resonance in remembering all wars, and the Second World War generation is still very much alive, and their memories of dead friends and brothers are real. I wonder also, though, if we should not use the chance to think carefully about the peace and the type of peace we want.

The Treaty of Versailles was famously vengeful. And famously that vengefulness was a mistake, that sowed the seeds of the next war.

The sense of vengeance is also understandable. The French and the British had lost millions of men, defending France from the German invasion. How could they not be angry?

And yet the failure to make a reasonable peace at Versailles is arguably a greater war crime than many of the atrocities that went on during the war itself. The details of the treaty were not arrived at through rushes of blood on the battlefield, but through calculated diplomacy in chamber rooms around Paris. They

had the chance to get it right, and that they got it so wrong was tremendously costly in the longer term.

On a human scale, most of us won't experience making peace terms after a war; a significant minority of us will, though, go through the experience of finding a way forward after, say, a divorce. And here too, there is a curious cocktail of genuine human emotion, not the emotion of an immediate argument, but emotion that has been distilled through time and daily life. When people end up in court, they aren't in a temper; but they can still have their minds twisted by a slow burning anger so that resentment festers.

This is where the Versailles mistake can come in. No doubt there is a sense in which the English and the French felt they were being perfectly fair in their demands on the Germans; the level of reparation they set was only right.

And yet that same, seemingly rational decision was toxic for the future. If, somehow, they had found a greater forgiveness, and had let go of some of their desire for revenge, the settlement could have been gentler, and one that didn't effectively destroy the German economy, and didn't set the climate for the growth of an extremist party like the Nazis.

Forgiveness is the greatest Christian quality; it's the one that Jesus preached in his life and embodied on the cross. It's amazing when it happens, but our attachment to 'fairness' often stops it happening.

*Sept 2019 Thought. for the Train is a short column by the Rev'd Robert Stanier, vicar of St Andrew and St Mark, Surbiton, for people to read on the train. You can also read "Thought for the Train" at [www.surbitonchurch.org.uk](http://www.surbitonchurch.org.uk).*