

**A reflection for remembrance from NWBA Regional Minister for Cumbria, Andrew Dodd  
(first broadcasted on BBC Radio Cumbria on 12<sup>th</sup> November 2017)**

Watching recruiting advertisements for the armed services, to me, the life they seem to offer is one of usefulness; fulfilment of purpose; friendship with colleagues; give and take and laughter in fun; deep relationships born out in adversity. A person is shown to have value to others in war or rescue zones and they find value in themselves. Going beyond friendship an experience of “fellowship” is created, found often where people share in adversity or face a common adversary; also experienced, for example, amongst climbers where the possibility and fact of death is faced and has to be dealt with together.

Facing the consequences, in particular, of the adversity of combat was revealed in a BBC programme this week ‘DIY SOS’. Undertaking the restoration of the last house on the formerly run-down ‘Veterans Street’ in Manchester, the final house was transformed for a former soldier struggling with below the knee amputation and single parenthood with three children for much of the week. He had been living in a small council house, alienated from that ‘fellowship’ he had experienced in the army; part of a disparate community who had not shared in nor could understand his ongoing suffering. Separated from this - who could understand his plight? A host of volunteers offered their skills and resources to create a suitable house for him and his family in a community which could support and understand. The past stories for all of these men and women were traumatic and continued to be very moving! Also, it was wonderful and moving to see the wider community support an initiative, which is expanding into other areas of the country

Contrasting to this heart-warming story, and sadly for many ex-servicemen and women, alienated from depths of relationship, fellowship, understanding and support; experiencing pain of memories and suffering ongoing trauma, I read of how they might take their own lives. By 2012 such deaths in the UK exceeded deaths in combat in Afghanistan and they continue. In the US in 2013, roughly 22 veterans were dying by suicide per day, or one every 65 minutes.<sup>[5]</sup>

Simon Jenkins writing in the Guardian, critiquing yearly remembrance says

“We really ought to get over it. Next year we should draw down the curtain and have a Forgetting Day, a Move On Day, a Fresh Start Day.”

Whilst I accept a number of his points, for many, the profound sense of loss of identity and connection, and continuing physical and mental trauma are not past events, they are living ones. For them and their families, places and times for ‘remembrance’ – re-making deep connections - are vital ‘life’ sustaining events.

The Christian faith centres, arguably uniquely, on the trauma and death of its founder as its defining point. The Christian Church therefore should and *can be* the place to remember and experience a measure of individual and communal healing as in its worship, we recall and... *proclaim* this death... “until he comes”. Remembering the facts surrounding the exemplar of the very lowest point in human experience, the Christian also finds hope and reconnects with depth and quality of fellowship in God and shares this with others. Rowan Williams writes that “*paradox lies at the heart of Christian spirituality ..*” the experience of life through death. Union with God is always through Christ in the world with all its sufferings temptations and weaknesses. “

And so we do not forget, we remember .... Opening ourselves to complexity and pain we join in the suffering of God in Jesus and all people and in so doing ...miraculously, against all odds, meet with and find hope in the God of resurrection who wills to bring fullness of life to all.

