

Dear Friends,

As one who likes and enjoys history, remembering dates has never really been a problem. I am usually very good at remembering significant events and birthdays and very rarely have to be reminded about them. I ought to be as the date I have in my mind also happens to be my wife's birthday. She also liked the idea that she was born on the birthday of the Queen Mother. So many of you may know already that the date I'm referring to is 4th August. The date of course is also significant because in 1914 it was the day that the United Kingdom entered the war. In this period of remembering centenary anniversaries this of course stood out four years ago.

However I recently discovered that there is another fascinating reason why we should remember this date. In 1918 as the 4th anniversary of the Great War was approaching King George V called the nation to a day of prayer. He himself gathered with Queen Mary and the members of the Houses of Parliament for a special service as part of this. It was exactly 100 days later that the War ended as the Armistice was signed, coming into effect on 11th November at 11am. The famous 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month, an event that will be commemorated up and down the country a hundred years later.

It was a timely act. The balance of power in the war was at a crucial stage. In the spring of that year the German army had launched a major assault that penetrated deep into the Allied held territory. It was the Germans last attempt to win the war and it seemed at the time it might well succeed. Though the British and French began to counter attack at the end of July, by the 4th August the matter was still very much in the balance. The need to pray for an end to the war was still a very necessary thing.

Shortly afterwards the Allies gained the upper hand which the Germans never regained. Slowly they were pushed back with defeat after defeat; aided by the arrival in large numbers of fresh American troops. After four years of attritional warfare and carnage on the battlefields victory was in sight. Slowly the German Allies began to desert them. The first nation to sign an armistice on 29th September was Bulgaria, then Turkey also signed one on 30th October and afterwards Austria-Hungary did the same on 3rd November. Finally the Germans also agreed to cease from hostilities.

As part of the celebrations of the centenary of the end of the war, a similar call has gone out to the churches. It is called Remembrance 100 and we were asked to pray for peace in the world between 4th August and 11th November. (I'm sorry but I only picked up on this recently in all the business of preparing for retirement.) However I think that this is a wonderful thing to do and invite you in the days that are left to join in these prayers. There is so much today that needs us to pray, particularly as we sense that there is a much more fragile world out there than we would like to have. The need is probably greater today than then.

Prayer is an opportunity to bring all our cares and concerns to God and trust Him to meet us in our needs and desires for things to be better. It is not only for peace we should pray but for so many other things. I am often amazed looking back on how things have been changed in my life. When I was first a believer it was a world dominated by the Cold War and the fear of Communism. While in South Africa the struggle against apartheid was seemingly endless and Northern Ireland seemed almost beyond hope. While I would not say these problems have disappeared in the main part these situations are vastly different and I am sure that prayer has been a massive part in these changes.

On November 11th there is to be a special service to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the end of the First World War. The Benefice will come together and mark it appropriately. Of all the centenary celebrations this is the most important and I am pleased it is happening. As you gather though, it is my prayer that foremost in your hearts that day will be the desire to continue to beseech Almighty God to give us all the grace to keep the peace and that we will never cease to ask Him to answer our prayer that this peace may be over all the world.

May the Lord richly bless you

Robert

PS This is not my last letter to you. Please look for that in the next months magazine as I say my final farewell to all.