

Delivery by Rev. Paul Grant at Service of Remembrance 12th February 2012

I've been invited to allow some words to gather around the evil nature of war
And what its dark friendship does to ordinary human lives.

But today I am painfully aware I have not lived these words
That I am speaking them second hand – from the safe distance of reflection.

When I am in the honoured company of men and their families
For whom war is not a word, but a Smell, a Fear in the gut, a Bloodstain on a shirt.

Or a Shovel digging a friend's grave, a Wound that stampedes through dreams,
A husband who left - But came back changed.

From the distance of second hand it's easy to see how War incites
The bullying nature of a country's culture to butt into the world like an angry ram.

But you who lived through it were never asked to ponder war's nature,
But were taken fresh from school and a family dinner table.

From a Saturday night's carefree dancing, or a Monday morning's factory floor
And far from these routines, suddenly asked to kill strangers in a strange land
And risk being killed by them.

How many birthdays passed not among those who gave you birth,
Or whom you went to school and kicked a ball with,
Those with whom you shared a working shift.

But how many birthdays passed loading a shell into a gun
Or getting through the hell of another day in Japanese captivity.

That's why I chose to begin with Moses encountering God
In the fire that burns and never goes out.

For all that you lived through and lost
All you brought back with you and can never forget
Has become Holy ground.

The fire of memory, the Flame of your suffering and love, burns and has not gone out
And from it we must listen, for it speaks to us a special word.

To be in your company is to stand on Holy ground
Where many young men left their kin behind
And found themselves in another family - the men they served with.

The comradeship that was the last candle left
In the dark and brutal night of Japanese captivity,

That brought enough light to remind you that despite your captors' best efforts
You were still human.

The light that came from sharing, the little that there was to live on,
The light that risked bearing the burden of a sick friend

The light that cajoled the dispirited not to give up but go on living
Cast a dignity among the captives
That no amount of brutality could take away.

So for every kindness planted in the barren camp's ground
For ever seed of gentleness sown in brutal soil

Whenever the miracle of a smile could still be found - There a true victory was won
That no boot, or beating or bashing could defeat.

For every grace found in the perimeter of a camp, for every goodness done to another
When only contempt was shown by your enemy.

For any mercy shared was a harder victory won than anything the evil around you presumed
It could win with its barbed wire and guns.

Perhaps this is why what you lived through,
The friends left behind, the stories you returned with
Has become for us holy ground.

There is a grace here in the flames of what we are remembering
That allows God to Speak to us in the fire of memory that has not burned out.

For Jesus Christ is only ever known as God
As the crucified - in the flame of suffering and love.

So today the light we want to see by is the light of all you went through,
The light of what you returned to
In trying to make a life from the little that captivity had left you.

The light of your stories, told and remembered
Is a flame we wish to keep faith with.

I cannot imagine an hour never mind the years that Lanarkshire Yeomen faced up to,
And went through, and survived to return home again.

And I cannot imagine how hard it must have been to come back home
And have those years living deep within you rise up like ghosts in the lawlessness of dreams.

How could a young lad go to the Far East - Hell and back
And be asked to live as if all that was in the past.

The thirst, The smell, The humidity and hunger, The fear and shadow of death
The lives that never made it back, But were carried home only in your heart

How could all of that be put aside?
The small bird of ordinary life must have found that a hard nest to live in.

There is a terrible injustice of being expected to fit back in to life
As if the Far East experiences could be laid aside or simply forgotten.

And in some cases to be told Never to name for yourself the story of your own life
As it was lived through those terrible years.

Is it not a continued brutality to send boys to war
And then not allow them to speak of it?

But then, how do you describe hell to someone who's never been.
In the end, words are poor mules unable to carry the weight
Of all that was gone through, of all that you continued to live with...

The casualties in peacetime are never numbered
But just as real.

We can only honour the lives of those who brought back broken pieces of who they were,
And slowly sought to mend the mirror.

To see themselves once more as Son, Father, Husband, Brother,
Yet always there on the mirror the deep scar of being a survivor.

We should honour the courage that sought to take ordinariness of work and family
Into a life that had lost all innocence.

We should honour the affection of a family that sought to live with one they loved,
Perhaps only slowly understanding that the camp they left behind was a wound too deep
For hands or words to touch - That would always have some stake in the life they lived.

Today
We want to listen
And hear
All that you wish to name.

We want to draw near the fire that speaks to us and never goes out
The flame of suffering and love where Christ's voice is heard.

And one day, Please God,
When Christ the wounded healer
Bids us to come
We shall all find a final healing
Where not one of the lambs
Who were left behind
Shall ever be lost again.