

Remembrance



Many years ago, I was working in a psychiatric hospital, caring for patients being assessed for varying stages of dementia. The heartbreak for relatives, and for staff, of watching someone who had lived a full and vibrant life being slowly reduced to becoming dependent upon others for basic needs being met was a daily reminder of how fragile and vulnerable life is at its core. We come into the world being dependent upon others and for so many, often blessed with a long life, we leave the world in the same state. Being dependent upon others for caring for our bodily needs brings its challenges and equally, if not more so, are the demands of caring for sick and poorly minds. At times, surrounded by thirty confused adults, it was difficult to remember the lives once lived, the contributions to society once made, the capacity for loving and nurturing once given and shared. Relatives were asked to share a photograph of patients in the prime of their lives as a way of reminding staff of who the person they were caring for used to be. Leading trade unionists, military officers, academics and even a psychiatric nurse, who had once worked on the ward, adorned bedside cabinets.

Many hours were spent with patients reminiscing about the 'good old days' in attempts to hold and recall vestiges of a distant life. Sadly, for many, this proved too much as the slow creep of frailty robbed minds of the ability to relate to anything beyond a few minutes, or even seconds. Occasionally there would be moments when, from deep within an almost abandoned consciousness, a stirring of awareness occurred, taking staff by surprise. I remember Mr Judd. Lost in a quagmire of confusion, unable to speak, with little facial expression, tears rolled down his cheeks on hearing the Last Post being broadcast from the Cenotaph. Inexplicably, he muttered one word, "*terrible...*" It was as if he was somehow managing to speak for others, who could no longer articulate, the pain of war, and sorrow for the Fallen.

In a world of confusion, with its competing demands and narratives, and in which the self-absorbed often seems to dominate so much of life, there remains a collective responsibility to remember those who have sacrificed themselves for the basic freedoms that we so often take for granted. Those who gave their lives and who have lost the ability to speak, ask that we speak for them, and in doing so to remember the “*terrible*” cost, not just for the victims of past conflicts but for those who continue to pay the price of war in our own day.

God Bless.

Revd Mark Bailey