

CHICHESTER CATHEDRAL

Date:	9 November 2025
Service:	Eucharist, Remembrance Sunday
Preacher:	The Revd Canon Vanessa Baron, Treasurer

Remembrance Sunday 2025 Job 19: 25-27a

For I know that my Redeemer lives,

and that at the last he will stand upon the earth; 26 and after my skin has been thus destroyed, then in my flesh shall I see God, 27 whom I shall see on my side, and my eyes shall behold, and not another.

My mother's side of the family come from Lancashire and many of the records we had at home were of the Halle Orchestra, which is based in Manchester. I grew up listening to Dame Isobel Baillie's 1941 recording of Handel's aria, 'I know that my redeemer liveth'. You can hear it still on Youtube – the tempo so much slower than is normal today – but her voice has great strength and a bell-like clarity. Isobel Baillie said in an interview that the opening phrase, 'I know that my redeemer liveth', has to be sung 'with a quiet conviction'. A poignant remark when we realise that the 1941 recording was made shortly after Manchester had been badly bombed in the Christmas Blitz of 1940. 684 people died in the two-night raids and more than 2000 were wounded.

Today we remember - all those who gave their lives fighting by land, sea and air; the civilians who died and all those who were wounded, physically and mentally. We remember as well all those who have borne the burden of war in other ways: the refugees; the prisoners of war; those who worked in the factories and on the land; the wives and families who helped care and restore people when they returned from war. We are mindful too that there are many in Britain today who bear the marks of recent wars: men and women who struggle with their disabilities and those for whom the sudden bang of a firework triggers their shell- shock or post-traumatic stress disorder as we now call it.

On occasions war brings out extraordinary courage and selflessness in people.

Sometime on the 3 August 1917, a young army doctor, mortally wounded, dictated a short letter to his fiancée. In it he wrote, 'Duty called and called me to duty'. The young man was Captain Noel Chavasse. He had gained the Military Cross in 1915, in the 2nd Battle of Ypres, going out at night to collect 18 wounded men from no man's land, disregarding the snipers. He wrote; 'Their joy and relief on being found was pitiful and fairly spurred me on to search for more.' Later, in 1916, he was wounded in the Battle of the Somme but despite this went out again at night, to collect the ID discs from dead men and to retrieve the wounded. To ensure he didn't miss bodies he took a torch and a whistle, calling out for the wounded, thus exposing himself to enemy fire. He carried on the same task the next day, in broad daylight, crawling from shell hole to shell hole. For that he was awarded the VC.

At Passchendaele the following year, on July 31 1917, Captain Chavasse received a severe head wound, which fractured his skull, but he refused to leave the frontline dressing post. 'For the (next) two days he continued to perform his duties, and in addition went out repeatedly under heavy fire to search for and attend to the wounded who were lying out. The Citation continued, 'During these searches, although practically without food during this period, worn with fatigue and faint with his wound, he assisted to carry in a number of badly wounded men, over heavy and difficult ground. By his extraordinary energy and inspiring example, he was instrumental in rescuing many wounded who would have otherwise undoubtedly succumbed under the bad weather conditions.'

On August 2 his aid post received a direct hit and Captain Chavasse sustained a major abdominal wound. He crawled for half a mile before being rescued but died three days later. He was awarded the VC for the second time, becoming the only man to receive the VC and Bar in World War 1.

Noel Chevasse had a privileged upbringing – the son of the Bishop of Liverpool, he took a first at Oxford and ran the 400 m in the 1908 Olympics. Before leaving for the Front, he wrote to his father saying that he hoped to be a 'faithful soldier of Jesus Christ', and after winning his first VC, he chose to stay there rather than being posted to a hospital well back from the lines, writing, 'I thought I had better stay with the lads.' Although he admitted, 'I felt rather depressed about it for a quarter of an hour'.

He arranged his funeral before going to France and one of the hymns he chose was 'Praise to the holiest in the height, and in the depth be praise.'

In the early 20 C, for the evangelical son of an evangelical Bishop of Liverpool, to choose a hymn by a Roman Catholic Cardinal was unusual! The words must have meant a great deal to him. The sixth verse reads, 'And in the garden

secretly, and on the cross on high, should teach his brethren, and inspire to suffer and to die.'

'I thought I had better stay with the lads' was the message Noel Chavasse wrote home – 'to suffer and to die.'

War may bring out extraordinary courage and selflessness in people, but we know too that the horrors of war can destroy people's faith as understandably they and we ask, "Where is God? Why doesn't he make it stop?"

In the North Aisle, as part of the 950 Exhibition, is a wooden cross made out of duckboards from First World War trenches. At one level it records the horror of the war, but the cross is also a symbol a hope, of forgiveness and reconciliation - of the way in which God, in Jesus Christ, came to be with us in our suffering and turn the horror of a slow, tortured death into something else, the means of salvation – to show us that death is not the end, For I know that my Redeemer lives... and in this flesh shall I see God.

As we remember today those who have suffered and sacrificed their lives, their health, their futures that we might be free: as we remember those who must live through the tragedy of war today, we give thanks for them and commit ourselves afresh to strive for peace and justice in our world. We pray that we too may learn 'to suffer and to die', but to do so in the 'sure and certain hope' that 'our Redeemer lives' and 'in this flesh shall I see God'.

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