

Remembrance Sunday sermon 2014
Russell Dewhurst, Vicar of Ewell

“Then suddenly, like a chasm in a smooth road, the war came.” So wrote Virginia Woolf twenty years after that war ended. It is now over a century since the Great War began. Yet it still seems to me very much like a chasm in a smooth road. History before 1914, the Trojan War to the Boer War, it seems another world. Yet there is something about 1914, 100 years ago it may be, that by contrast seems so closely connected to us, to 2014. The guns of August blew a hole in time, marked in blood the end of one world and the beginning of another.

We've all heard about the unprecedented numbers who have visited the Tower of London— four million people have gone to see the poppies stretching over an area the size of sixteen football pitches. They have done this, not out of idle curiosity, but because we still feel the need to remember 1914; and to enact our remembrance of its sacrifices.

It's not just the Tower of London. Throughout this year, television, newspapers, books, and websites have all told and retold the story of a century ago from every possible angle. Local history projects in Epsom, Ewell, and every community in the land have brought that story close to home, made it intimate, and we realise again: it is still our story. As one of the first international events to be filmed and captured in thousands of hours of newsreel, 1914 is alive to us in a way previous generations are not. And the technology that shaped so powerfully the events of World War One— machine guns, tanks, submarines, aeroplanes, gas, radio— begins a chain that stretches across the past century, a century of invention, innovation, and advancing technology. Our lives would be unrecognisable without technology. How many of us, for example, are here today only because of modern medicine? So the lives of 1914, already shaped by technology in ways unimaginable to the generations before, are uncannily, unexpectedly, close to our own.

If the past hundred years was a century of technological change, it was also a century of war. The Great War did not end all wars. You cannot speak of history since 1918 without talking of wars. And today we are remembering not only those who fell in World War One but also those killed in the Second World War, other conflicts large and small, some all too raw and recent. As we look back over the years, we're reminded that, directly or indirectly, all our lives have been shaped by war. Somehow, in the memories and emotions each of us brings to church today, 1914 can represent all these past wars and

act as a focus and beginning of remembering. As one poet wrote: “Whenever war is spoken of I find / The war that was called Great invades the mind...”

After 100 years, we are still remembering. How long will remembrance continue? What of the years ahead? Some here will have known those who served in WW1, but the youngest of you here were born in the twenty-first century... You, or perhaps a friend at school, might have younger brothers or sisters just born this year, 100 years after war broke out. Will 1914 seem like ancient history to them? Will your generation continue to remember as the years go by?

For myself, I think Remembrance can continue. I think that because I know that we Christians remember events, not of one century ago, but of twenty centuries past. Day by day, we try to shape our lives around faithful remembering. We remember the words and deeds, life and death, of God's Son come among us two thousand years ago. And all those memories are alive, transforming us, we hope, helping us to live better as human beings, as people who try to live out God's will. Twenty centuries, and still going strong. Remembering *never* needs to fade.

So, similarly, I think that Remembrance of 1914 can continue and will continue. We have a duty to remember them, and we also have a *need* to remember them. As we look back across the century that separates us, the most important things have not changed. Love and faithfulness; patriotism; a readiness to sacrifice oneself for the sake of others. These things we recognise in any and every age. A hundred years may have passed, yet still, it was only yesterday.

Amen.