On Remembrance Sunday, when we remember those who have found themselves caught up in some of the most violent and dangerous moments of history – those who fought and those who suffered. As we remember their lives and stories each year, I cannot be the only one who finds myself asking: if I had been there what would I have done. If history came knocking at the door of my life, how would I respond? Would I recognize the struggle for freedom, justice and peace or would I collude with the comfortable. Would I be prepared to act to help those who suffered, or would I simply look out for myself? It is a question that haunts me a little.

Today's parable is a curious one, but it has a fairly simple message: be prepared. If you want to be ready when the moment comes, start preparing ahead. And so, on this Remembrance Sunday, as we think about having courage to work for peace, I perhaps we should spend some time with this idea of getting ourselves ready.

The Government has started advising us to prepare for potential crises – just essentials to get us through a few days should there be a problem. Has anyone been popping a few extra tins in their trolley, or stocking up on bottled water or investing in a solar powered phone charger? But when a crisis hits, when conflict looms and division seems to be growing, then our spiritual preparation matters too.

One of the most remarkable examples of spiritual preparation I have ever encountered happened in our own Coventry story. Eighty-six years ago, in the old Cathedral Church of St Michael, Provost Howard and his congregation were also gathered for Remembrance Sunday. In the liturgy of that day, they prayed this remarkable prayer:

Lord of boundless love,
who in thine hour of agony didst pray for those
who nailed thee to the Cross,
we beseech thee for our enemies
that thou wouldst turn their hearts
and incline them to mercy.
So that when this hour of conflict is passed
they and we may be united in the bonds of Christian love
and work together as friends
for the advancement of thy kingdom
by the power of thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord.

Days later, the war came right to Coventry's door. The Blitz devastated the city and destroyed the church in which that prayer had been prayed. But in the midst of that horror, when vengeance would have been an entirely understandable response, Provost Howard chose to give a message of hope. He spoke of a future in which the cathedral would be rebuilt, and the relationships with those who had destroyed it would likewise be restored. That was the start of our ministry or reconciliation which has inspired thousands of people to work for peace. It is hard to measure the impact of the choice

Provost Howard made that day. But he was able to make that choice, not because – in a moment of crisis – he was suddenly given supernatural goodness, but because he had been preparing for it. His prayer on Remembrance Sunday shows that he was already praying for his enemies. He wasn't condoning their violence. He wasn't saying that the struggle against Nazi ideology didn't matter. He was praying for their hearts and longing for the day when they would again be friends and co-workers in God's Kingdom. How are the prayers you are praying today preparing you to respond well to the conflicts and challenges of our times?

But it is not simply how we pray – it is how we act. If we want to be prepared to be peacemakers in times of crisis and conflict, we need to start practicing the actions of peacemakers now. When I worked in the NHS, we had to refresh our resuscitation training every year. It was extremely boring and repetitive but you couldn't get out of it. Basic Life Support isn't actually that difficult, but when a crisis hits, people often freeze and struggle to work out what to do next. Repeating our training regularly meant that we didn't have to think. Our response was automatic. We could do what needed to be done without delays or confusion.

Earlier this year, I had the privilege of making a brief visit to our CCN partners at St Paul's Lutheran Cathedral in Odessa. I was keen to go and show our love and solidarity as the war ground on into its fifth year. But I also wanted to learn from them what it looked like to be church under bombardment. And what I learned was both remarkable and remarkably simple. It looked like being the church. Against the backdrop of air raids and power cuts and displacement and need, anchored in their practices of worship and prayer, they housed and supported those who had fled homes which were now behind the frontline. They fed old people. They ran cubs for children. They provided training and support for their lay leaders, who were offering pastoral care in devastating circumstances. They collected donations from church family around the world to invest in solar panels to ensure their neighbours had power. They organized work clubs for men with mental health challenges. In the midst of the death and destruction of war, their practical love for those around them shone brighter than ever. It wasn't easy. The strain of war told on the remarkable women and men that I met. They were angry and scared and tired. Most weren't anywhere near talking about reconciliation. And yet, the faith they had practiced for decades had shown them how to respond with defiant hope and resilient love in a situation of hate and despair.

If you want to be ready when the moment arrives, you need to get ready now. Whether that is in the prayers you pray today or the actions you take practice peace today.

The theme for today's sermon was the **courage** to work for peace. I haven't spoken much about courage – I have spoken about preparation, about practicing ahead of time, the values and actions you hope you will live by when the chips are down. But perhaps that is more relevant to courage than we might imagine.

Today on Remembrance Sunday, alongside all victims of war, we remember those who have served our country in the armed forces. Our military know a thing or two about courage. Indeed courage is the first of the five values of the British Army, and what they say about courage is interesting. They say that it is doing your duty, doing the right thing, in adverse circumstances. It is not about not being afraid, but feeling afraid and still doing what needs done. And they say that the way to develop courage is through discipline and training. Courage isn't something innate – that we either have or don't have. Courage is a learned behaviour, something we practice today by doing the right things even when it is a little uncomfortable, so that one day, when it is very uncomfortable to do the right thing, we will have built up the courage to do it anyway.

There is no greater act of remembrance for those who have lost their lives in past war and conflict than to work for peace today. It is easy to wear a poppy. It's easy to stand quietly for two minutes each November. It's hard to pray for those who annoy or upset you. It is hard to speak up for those in society who are badly treated. It is hard to refuse the polarizing forces of global politics and value the humanity of all. It is hard when life feels hard to see beyond our own struggles and care about the needs of others. But just as our military personal use training and discipline to help them develop the courage they need to do their job, we need to be intentional about preparing and practicing those things that will give us courage.

So my question for you this morning, is what will you practice and how will you prepare to work for peace. What is one action you might take to do justly, love mercy and walk humbly with God, even when it is a bit out of your comfort zone? For if we are faithful now in the smaller things, we can trust that God will be faithful when the big moment comes, giving us the courage to act for justice, for mercy, for love and for peace.